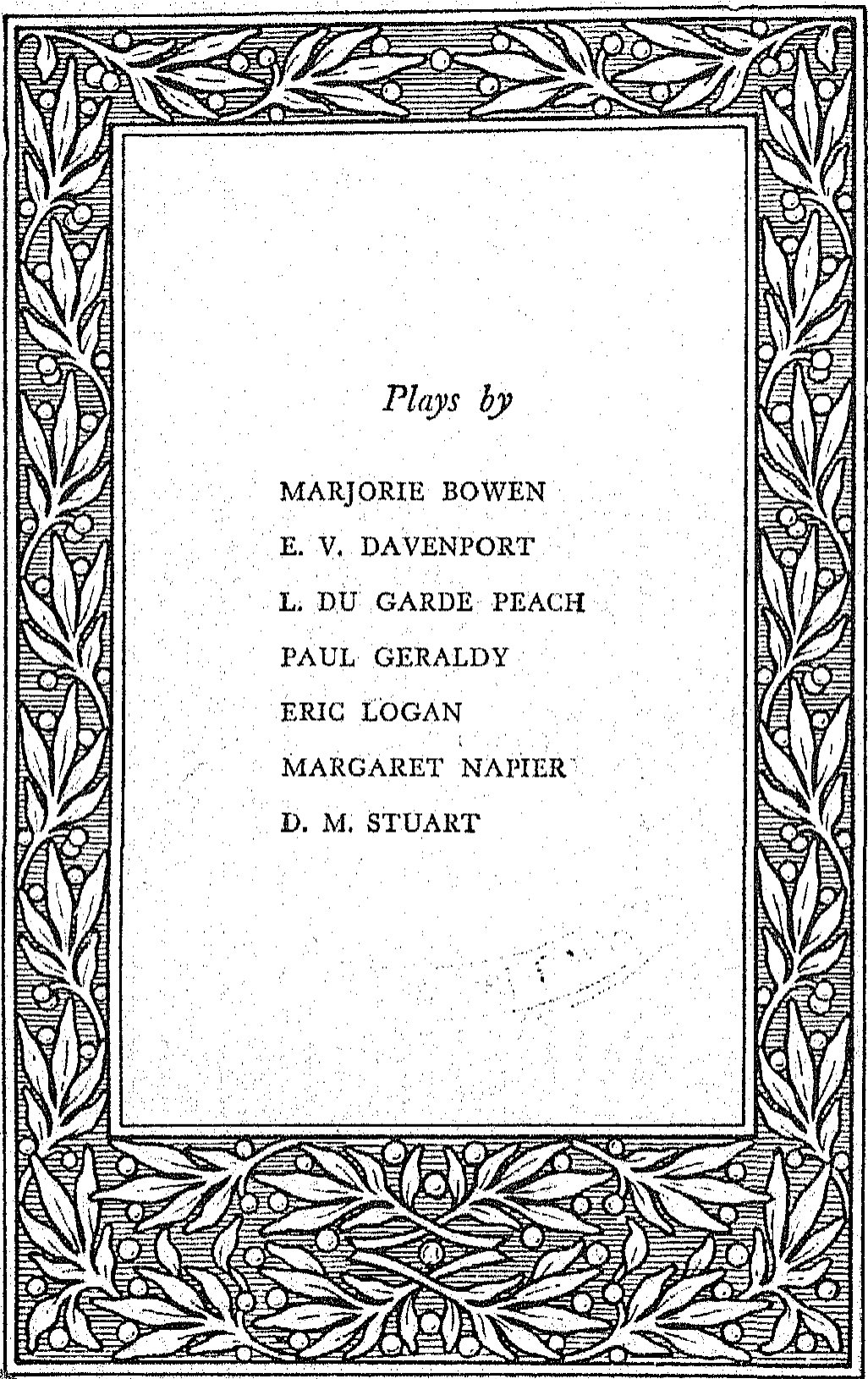


Plays by

MARJORIE BOWEN

E. V. DAVENPORT

L. DU GARDE PEACH

PAUL GERALDY

ERIC LOGAN

MARGARET NAPIER

D. M. STUART

The Laurel and Gold Series

THE SECOND BOOK OF SENIOR PLAYS

Selected by

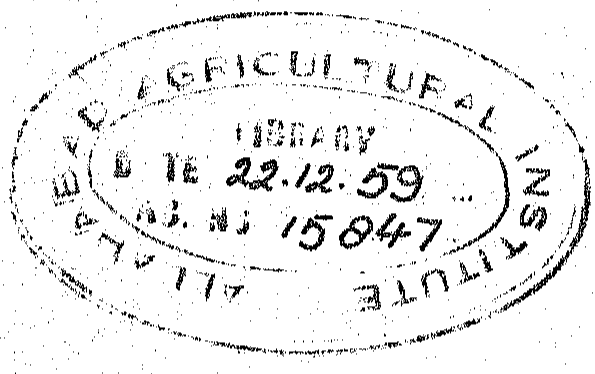
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INTRODUCTION

THIS volume, like its predecessor, *Senior Plays, Book I*, contains a selection of recent plays illustrating some of the characteristic tendencies of the modern one-act play.

The proper way to study the book, whether it be at home, in school, or at the dramatic club, is to begin by reading the plays through silently. This will enable the reader to get a general idea of what each play is about and should encourage him to imagine for himself what form the ultimate dramatic representation should take. This latter is most important; the ability to read plays dramatically to ourselves is well worth encouraging. It is equally worth while for one individual to read an entire play aloud, dramatically. This again will stimulate the imagination and develop the ability to act.

The plays are intended to be acted; and the silent reading of the plays by individuals—with possibly an oral reading of the whole play by one individual—should be followed by a dramatic reading by a group. Here again there is need for a variety of methods of approach. "Casting to type"—i.e. inviting certain readers to interpret certain parts which fall most naturally to them

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—has obvious advantages. But others should be given the opportunity of " trying on " the various characters in the play. And if you are interested in acting, and it is surprising how many people are to-day, you will enjoy attempting to interpret a character which is perhaps least akin to your own. Thus, in a reading the men might read the women's parts and the women the men's. It is amazing how much you see in a part which you have already taken yourself when you watch someone else trying to interpret it for you. After dramatic reading, of course, comes formal production; and although this is perhaps not necessary and certainly not practicable in all cases, it is the ultimate and desirable thing. It is only when you study a play in the detail which a formal dramatic performance demands that you can be sure you have got everything out of it, and even this may be stimulated afterwards by observing how another group of people—professionals or amateurs—have dealt with the same play.

But when we reach the subject of dramatic production we need someone to control the groups. and it is here that the producer steps in. The ideal producer takes charge of the play as a whole. He tries to see to it that the co-ordinated result of the work of a team of actors fits together to make a living picture resembling what he believes the dramatist had in his mind when the play was written. Thus the producer is something

of an artist in his perception and understanding of the play. He is an interpreter in the way in which he tries to weave together into a single whole the combined efforts of his team of actors. But the successful producer needs a third quality. He must be something of a wizard—he must understand the wizardry of the theatre, that is, the technicalities of theatrical production.

The world of the stage is an unreal one. We create, for the benefit of the audience, certain imaginary individuals, people whose actual words, and perhaps many of whose very actions, the dramatist has already set down for us. We, as actors and actresses, try to make these separate characters live. The producer, like the conductor of an orchestra, draws our interpretations together, keeps them in harmony one with another and with the end and purpose of the play. In doing this he uses what we have called the wizardry of the theatre. It may be wizardry of two kinds and the first we shall mention is probably the less important. We have grown accustomed on our modern stage to rely upon the use of curtains, lights, scenery, costume, make-up, etc., all of which are material things added to the play primarily to assist in the interpretation. The professional stage makes greater use of these things generally than amateurs, and for many obvious reasons. But they are, in fact, the less impressive part of what we have called this

wizardry of the stage, this magic which helps an audience to believe that they are seeing not actors and actresses, but living characters. The more important part of this magic is the influence and meaning which producer and actor can bring to bear on the play by the proper control of the acting itself. The qualities which make acting are the proper use of the voice, the meaningful variation of its pitch and speed, the effective use of pause and emphasis and correct manipulation of gesture and movement, as well as the proper grouping of the players themselves, and are more essential to good play-producing than curtains and costumes and coloured lights. These latter things have their place—but they are external aids—these other things, the voice, gesture, grouping, pace and tone of the dialogue, are in the play and of it, and, after all, "the play's the thing."

1935. J. E. M.

DESCRIPTION OF PLAYS

JUST BOYS

THIS is probably the most difficult and the most subtle play in the volume. It deals with an elusive subject—parental love—and the inability of the youthful mind to appreciate it. It is remarkable that a play of such short duration can in such limited compass deal with so abstract and yet so extensive a theme. It is interesting too because it was written by a Frenchman, Paul Geraldy (the translation is by Virginia and Frank Vernon) and serves to remind us of the fact that the popularity of the one-act play is by no means confined to English-speaking peoples.

There are no real difficulties in the staging of the play, but the acting calls for that quiet and deep sincerity which only long experience can bring.

It is certainly a play to study and to try to act and interpret—but only the most experienced societies would be wise to perform it in public.

THE MAP

THIS is typical of the romantic and picturesque appeal which the one-act play can use. Its theme

is not essentially moving, although it is sufficiently interesting. The setting for the play, as described in the stage directions, is an intriguing one, but it should not be represented in too great a detail unless the producer and his stage manager are prepared to go to an extreme amount of trouble in the preparation. A sufficiently romantic atmosphere can be obtained by the use of picturesque costumes —provided the players learn how to wear and carry them—and this will not be accomplished in a single dress rehearsal! There is plenty of room for creative imagination in the design of the dresses. And if this part of the production is done well the play will be much more effective than if they had been merely hired for the performance. Too brusque an interpretation on the actors' part, however, will ruin the whole effect. There should be a gracious ease in both movement and speech which will prove reminiscent of a bygone romantic age. To play it too quickly or in too staccato a style will reduce it to burlesque.

FAMILY COMEDY

THIS little play can hardly be accepted as a true picture of family life in Early Victorian England. It is, rather, a clever caricature of what we "moderns" delight in regarding as typical of that bygone generation. To be effective it must

be played with forcefulness and conviction—in fact somewhat boldly. The need for careful team work in the dramatic interpretation is more apparent here than with any other play in the volume.

It is definitely not a play to be exploited by one or two people, although those who take the parts of Mr. and Mrs. John Porter may be tempted to do so. The satire in the minor parts is just as pointed as that contained in the two characters already mentioned, and the producer must see to it that the play lives up to its title by allowing all the members of this family group to play their respective parts to the full.

Costume, hairdressing and stage setting will all have to be prepared with care and with due regard to the time of action, of which the dramatist gives such definite information.

The sound of a piano played off stage is not difficult to provide, particularly if a pianist is available who is clever enough to imitate the marked hesitation and inappropriate emphasis which generally characterise the efforts of a would-be infant musical prodigy.

The dramatist's suggestions for a brief tableau before and after the play are good and should be followed.

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WAYSIDE WAR

This play will make a certain appeal on account of its picturesque costume and because of its slight historical background. But its real points of interest lie in the mystery of the missing plan and the piquancy of the debate between Alicia and the Colonel. These two subjects are the ones on which the producer should concentrate. It needs to be played at a fair pace, and the interest of the audience in the fate of the plan must be maintained until Alicia's confession a minute or two before the final curtain. The hesitant, almost romantic, conclusion is nearly an anti-climax. But with careful playing even the last few lines may be made intriguing. They certainly require a slower pace.

Alicia and the Colonel obviously dwarf the remaining characters, and the play will stand or fall according to how these two act, and what is equally important on the stage, react, towards each other.

Although a picturesque setting would help the play, it is by no means a necessity.

THE RECOIL

No collection of one-act plays would be complete without at least one "thriller" or "shocker."

Notice in this play how carefully the dramatist gives you all the necessary information in the first part for you to realise at the end and in one single flash of recognition the full significance of the climax.

Staging here can be simple and suggestive, but each of the four character parts needs careful study and interpretation. A complete black-out is of course an absolute essential for the effectiveness of the conclusion of the play, and there are certain noises-off which will add immeasurably to the atmosphere of the piece and which are not difficult to reproduce, the one, the rain, by the old expedient of the dried peas in the revolving drum, and the other, the weird Indian music, by the playing of a suitable gramophone record.

MEET MRS. BEETON

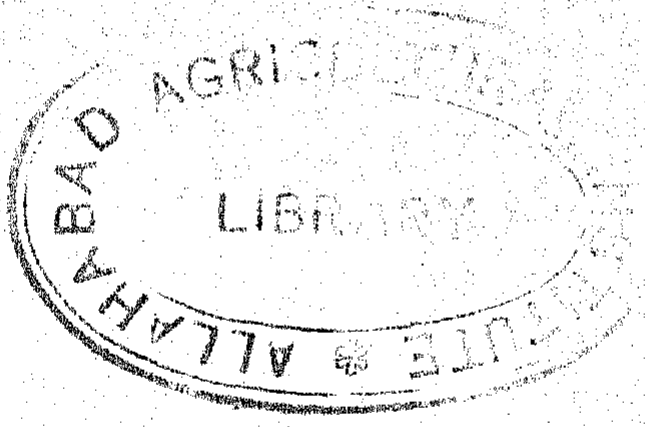
THIS play strikes a note of broad comedy which is likely to appeal to almost any type of audience. It demands, however, a measure of exaggeration in the acting to bring out the full quality of the

comedy. The whole skill of the production here lies in keeping a fair pace and in holding that measure of exaggeration within reasonable bounds. Though the comedy may appear easy, it is well to remember that the serving and the partaking of a meal on the stage call for the utmost care in production. Every movement must be timed to a second, and to less than a second, and yet the finished effect must appear spontaneous and perfectly natural.

It is an easy and a pleasant play to read; it must be rehearsed with extreme care if the audience are to enjoy it to the full.

JUST BOYS

PAUL GERALDY



CHARACTERS

MONSIEUR PELISSIER, *a famous architect (middle aged)*.

JACQUES, *his son* (22 *years*).

DUREUX, *Jacques' friend* (20 *years*).

A MAID.

JUST BOYS

A young man's room in his father's apartment. A single bed, a table or desk, an ordinary wardrobe, various chairs. The room seems to have been furnished with remnants. Books, etc., about.

At the rise of the curtain, JACQUES *is discovered. He is 22 years old. Buried in an armchair, his feet on the edge of the table, higher than his head. He is studying. He is reading a thick volume and smoking a small pipe.*

A knock at the door.

Jacques: What is it?

A Maid (opens the door): Monsieur Dureux.

Jacques: At last!

(DUREUX *enters. He is a young man about the same age as* JACQUES.)

Dureux: Busy?

Jacques: Why are you so late?

Dureux: I was with Henriette.

Jacques: I thought so.

Dureux: She had to come this way, too. I am to meet her again at five o'clock, quite near here. (*He looks at his watch*).

Jacques: One of these fine days you'll bump into my father or one of my sisters when you are with your lady friend.

Dureux: How are things here?

Jacques: Do you hear what I say?

Dureux (*repeats*): How are things here?

Jacques (*as before*): Do you hear what I say?

Dureux (*lifting his voice*): Yes, yes, I do. . . . (*In a lower voice.*) How are things here?

Jacques (*lifts his voice*): All right, all right. . . . (*In a softer voice.*) Father's tired.

Dureux: Is he?

Jacques: He has just finished his plan for the hotel in the Rue George the Second. Did I tell you about it?

Dureux: Twenty-five times. Have you seen the plan?

Jacques: No, but Jacquemin has. He says the façade's beautiful, the massing of the roofs extremely well done, and the whole thing has great character. He says it's both modern and powerful.

Dureux: Your father is in fine form, isn't he?

Jacques: You can't imagine the amount of work he does! He's wearing himself out. He's grown older in the past year. Have you noticed that he doesn't seem to stand as straight as he used to?

Dureux: No.

Jacques: I think he looks depressed. He's probably worried.

Dureux: What about?

Jacques: Financial things . . . the failure of

the Bader Bank affected him a great deal more than he admitted.

Dureux : Do you think it did ?

Jacques : He is selling almost all his pictures. The Prud'hon is gone from the dining-room. Anyway, it's time he had a rest. Last year he talked about a holiday. He was planning to make a cruise. He has been thinking about it for a long time. This year he hasn't mentioned it. He's accepted the most enormous commissions instead.

Dureux : If he were worried financially, he'd tell you about it.

Jacques : Father ? You don't know him.

Dureux : Is he at home ?

Jacques : Yes, in the studio.

Dureux : Shall I go and shake hands with him ?

Jacques : Why ?

Dureux : It would be polite.

Jacques : Go on, then.

Dureux : You come with me.

Jacques : No.

Dureux : Why ?

Jacques : Did you come here to see my father or me ?

Dureux : Don't you want me to go and shake hands with him ?

Jacques : It wouldn't kill him if you didn't.

Dureux : I don't suppose it would ! But I always feel that he likes to see your friends. Besides, I

often dine here. You always drag me off to your own room after coffee because any conversation with the family bores you. It makes me look like a cad. Don't you mind my looking like a cad?

Jacques: Don't let me stop you from seeing my father. Go on, if you want to.

Dureux (sitting down): I have never met such a tyrant.

Jacques: Why didn't you come yesterday?

Dureux: I was with Henriette.

Jacques: Again?

Dureux: Tuesday is the only day she's free, you know that. We always spend Tuesdays together.

Jacques: But to-day is not Tuesday.

Dureux: No, to-day is an exception, I . . .

Jacques: We agreed that after Easter you would come and work with me here every day. The greater part of the time you can't come at all because of Henriette. When you do come, it's always very late because of Henriette. You leave very early because of Henriette.

Dureux: You bore me. I'm in love with the girl.

Jacques: I know, but think of your future. Your exams are not far off—May, June . . .

Dureux: I study at night.

Jacques: And you look rosy, don't you? This year is very important for you . . . you must pass.

Dureux: I know.

Jacques: What are you going to do to-morrow?

Dureux: To-morrow I . . .

Jacques : Going to be with Henriette ?

Dureux : I'm not sure. She told me . . .

Jacques : As from Monday next, we must start to go through the codification of the laws of labour together.

Dureux : Right.

Jacques (opens a drawer) : Look at my ties.

Dureux : More ties ?

Jacques : How do you like this one ?

Dureux : You do nothing but buy ties.

Jacques : How about that one ?

Dureux : No.

Jacques (impressed) : Oh ? You have no taste. Blue can easily be vulgar, but this shade is lovely, quite unusual.

Dureux : I don't think so. That's a good one !

Jacques : Oh, brown ! Of course, brown's always safe. You are careful, aren't you ?

Dureux : You've got too many.

Jacques : You can't have the blue one !

Dureux : Why not ?

Jacques : You don't like it.

Dureux : I'm growing used to it.

Jacques : Right. I'll keep it.

Dureux : Dirty dog !

Jacques : Take the brown one; you like it.

Dureux (makes a face) : Brown . . .

Jacques : Leave it alone, then. (*Closes the drawer.*)

Dureux : What time is it ? 15847

Jacques (*angrily*): Oh, you have hardly been here ten minutes. Shut up!

Dureux: Is that new? (*He goes over to a framed mezzotint on the wall.*)

Jacques: Yes, I bought it this morning.

Dureux: What is it?

Jacques: A fragment of the predella of the Madonna of Cortona.

Dureux: What?

Jacques: It's very beautiful, I don't mind telling you.

Dureux: Bluff!

Jacques: And famous, too, you poor mutt?

Dureux: Who is it by?

Jacques: Fra Angelico.

Dureux: What does it represent?

Jacques: The Holy Virgin in the Tomb. The sentiment is charming. Christ has come back to earth and is mingling with the crowd burying His mother, do you see?

Dureux: Is that Christ there? Why is He holding a child in His arms?

Jacques: That is what is so charming about it. The little, tied-up creature Christ is holding in His arms represents the nucleus of His mother's soul. Jesus is nursing the soul which suffered for Him, just as His mother nursed Him. The one who was nursed has become the nurse. . . . A charming idea, isn't it? Of course, it's a little effortful . . . still, it's Italian.

Dureux : Oh ! (*Looks at his watch.*) This time. . . .

Jacques : Wait one second.

DUREUX *takes his coat.*

Dureux : I can't.

Jacques : Wait one second. I had a letter from Yvonne.

Dureux (*puts his coat down*) *:* Why didn't you say so before ?

Jacques : You've been talking the whole time.

Dureux : What a queer chap you are ! While you are thinking of nothing but your letter, you let me drivel on. (*Sitting down.*) Well ?

Jacques (*taking the letter out of the drawer of his table*) *:* It's a fine letter. . . .

Dureux : When are you going to get married ?

Jacques : I don't know. . . . When I can afford it.

Dureux : Nonsense ! Your father would come up to scratch. You'd be all right.

Jacques : Don't talk rot. My father can't give me much. He intends to do well by my sisters. Quite right, too. Besides, I have already told you, he is hard up. Do you think I would get married before I had a job and let my father wear himself out keeping two homes instead of one ? Well, I wouldn't. . . . Yvonne is twenty and I am twenty-two. We can wait. We'll get married

when I can keep my wife, not before. It may not be so long!

Dureux: You ought to get engaged. . . .

Jacques: We are.

Dureux: I mean officially.

Jacques: What for?

Dureux: It would be better for both of you.

Jacques: I don't think so.

Dureux: Have you told your father yet?

Jacques: No, I will talk to my father later, when I am ready to get married. I don't intend to look like a poor fool of a youngster who wants to get married and can't!

Dureux: Mysteries are beastly.

Jacques: There isn't any mystery. But it's no good talking about things like that to your family. They make you feel so uncomfortable. They wouldn't understand and I would. . . .

Dureux: Your father would understand.

Jacques: Of course he would. My father is not an imbecile.

Dureux: Well, then?

Jacques: Listen to Yvonne's letter.

Dureux: Why not tell him what you've told me?

Jacques: Listen to this. I'll just read the first sentence . . . not the beginning. . . . Here, for instance. . . . "You told me that . . ." (*The door opens, enter* MONSIEUR PELISSIER. JACQUES *shoves the letter in his pocket and speaks with forced brightness.*) Hello, Father!

Pelissier: Do you mind lending me your newspapers? You here, Dureux?

Dureux: How do you do, sir?

Pelissier: Were you busy?

Dureux: No, no, we were only talking.

Jacques: We were just going to start work. Here are the papers. (*He gives him the papers.*)

Pelissier (*putting the papers in his pocket*): Thanks. Am I in the way?

Dureux: Of course not. I had just asked Jacques if I couldn't go and see you.

Pelissier: Why didn't you?

Dureux: Well, sir . . . I

Pelissier (*sitting down*): Any news . . . ?

Jacques: Not going out this afternoon?

Pelissier: No.

Jacques: Why? You ought to. It is still fine.

Pelissier: My son always does that! Every time I come into his room, he sends me out for a walk.

Jacques: And I am right. You've been told to walk. You never do. You are like a child. (*To* DUREUX.) See how he looks?

Dureux: You do look tired, sir.

Pelissier (*looking at the mezzotint hanging on the wall*): Why, it's the Cortona Madonna! (*To* JACQUES.) That is the placing in the tomb I was talking to you about yesterday. Why didn't you tell me you had it, you silly ass? Do you know it, Dureux?

Dureux: No, it's rather fine.

Pelissier: Isn't it?

Jacques (*half tenderly, half crossly*): Father, I want you to go out.

Pelissier: Can't you leave me alone? (*To* DUREUX.) Do you understand its symbolic meaning? Christ is holding a child in His arms while His mother is being buried. That child represents the nucleus of the dead woman's soul. He is nursing it, just as His mother nursed Him. A charming idea, isn't it? A little effortful, perhaps. . . . Still, it's Italian. Have you any news?

Dureux: Spring.

Pelissier: It is always spring with you young people. What else?

Jacques (*sulkily to his father*): What news do you expect him to have? He's busy.

Dureux: No, you're the busy one, sir.

Pelissier: Yes. I have just finished the plans for a very big thing.

Dureux: Jacques told me—a modern hotel.

Pelissier: Oh! You know about it! Yes, a hotel. It's rather an amusing lay out.

DUREUX *refuses to notice the signs that* JACQUES *has been making to him for the past couple of minutes behind his father's arm-chair.*

Dureux: It is going to be ultra modern?

Pelissier: Of course. What amuses me in that kind of work is that it makes one break away from

all the old formulæ. Shops, banks, stations, they can't be designed in the true Louis XV. or Louis XVI. style. One has to find some new treatment that satisfies multiple demands. Old-fashioned methods can't . . .

JACQUES, *aggravated by all this talk, puts the letter back in his drawer, shuts it and goes out of the room, banging the door behind him.* PELISSIER *turns his head and finishes his phrase in an absent-minded tone of voice.*

Pelissier: . . . cannot furnish the required proportions. . . .

Dureux: No, of course not. We live differently, consequently, we must build differently, just as . . .

Pelissier: Wait a moment. (*He looks at the door.*) What's the matter with him? (*A pause.*) Why is he angry? Because I wouldn't go out? Did I interrupt something? (DUREUX *is silent.*) Yes, I did.

Dureux: No, really, sir. We have no secrets. . .

Pelissier: Liar! Of course I interrupted you.

Dureux: No, you didn't, sir.

Pelissier: What an ass! Why didn't he say so? (*He opens the door.*) He's gone. (*He closes the door, upset.*) Damn it!

Dureux: He's a bit difficult. We are always quarrelling.

Pelissier: How nice of you!

Dureux: I'll go and find him.

Pelissier: Stay where you are! (*A pause.*) What does he think he is going to do? Marry her?

Dureux (*with a start*): Who?

Pelissier: Clever, aren't you? Discretion is the better part of lovemaking. Don't give anybody away. He likes mysteries. So we'll say no more about it. (*A pause.*) What's he thinking? What's he dreaming of? The girl is charming. She is better than that. She is, she is, well, she's . . . charming . . . ! and she's intelligent . . . and pretty, too! Ever met her?

Dureux: Yes.

Pelissier: Isn't she pretty?

Dureux: Yes, very.

Pelissier: A delightful type of modern woman. What does he want? I'd be mad about my daughter-in-law. What on earth is he waiting for? Do you mind telling me?

Dureux: He hasn't made good yet.

Pelissier: What's that got to do with it? Where do I come in? He knows perfectly well that he has only to tell me . . . just tell me . . . and . . . (*A silence, then brusquely.*) How old were you when your father died?

Dureux: Fifteen.

Pelissier: A babe in arms! Then he never knew you. . . . Do you like your father's books?

Dureux: Do I? Yes, very much. . . . Well, I mean, they are rather technical, aren't they?

Pelissier: Very! You're the son of a doctor. Have you ever thought of studying medicine?

Dureux: My father always said he didn't want me to.

Pelissier: That's the way of fathers.

Dureux (timidly): Did you want Jacques to be an architect?

Pelissier: I don't know. I have always said not; but I would have liked a son who could talk to me. Mine is mute. It is a nuisance.

Dureux: Silence means understanding sometimes.

Pelissier: Think so?

Dureux: He's scared of you.

Pelissier: Nonsense! He may have been when he was a kid. For fifteen years or so the relationship between father and son is that of a policeman and an offender. But we've passed that period. . . .

Dureux: All the same, you do sometimes frighten him. You may not realise it, sir, but you are rather frightening.

Pelissier: Soft-hearted people generally are. (*A pause.*) They growl and they decide to "make up for it to-morrow." Lord, man, think of it! A son born, of your flesh, of your mind! What a pal he'll be! He starts by being just the ordinary baby. You make faces over him. He grows into

boyhood, he's unfinished, teasing, turbulent. He infuriates you. Then he's a big student fellow, lazy and proud. When the final chrysalis falls off him at last, you take a look. He is over twenty. He is a man! It's an epoch-making moment. You've attained your end, you've arrived. You yearn for him. What an understanding there is going to be between you two! He's flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone. . . . You'll be able to talk to each other! Good God, yes . . . and then you begin to contemplate, and the result is silence. Your son is there in your house, his room is at the end of the corridor. What is happening in that room? What is he thinking of in there? What are his dreams? His friends know, so do his sweethearts. But for his parents, for his father, there's a closed door, with an unknown youth behind it. Where's the "pal" now? Who is this stranger?

Dureux: He's your pal, sir. I am sure of it. If only I could make you understand. He's a little self-conscious. He's afraid to come out in the open.

Pelissier: He has no mother, Dureux. It makes a difference. I have my two daughters, but with them it is quite the opposite. Daughters talk too much. Marie and Jeanne are both of them sweet little things, charming, intelligent . . . but for me it's my son who matters.

Dureux: He feels the same. (PELISSIER *smiles*

at him sceptically.) He does! If you could hear him talk about you. You're his model, his ideal. He swears by you. If you could only know how much he admires everything you do.

Pelissier: He? No, my boy. . . . I see more clearly than you think. Not only does he not admire me. I don't even ask that much of him, but sometimes I feel that. . . . (*He hesitates for a second, then continues.*) One afternoon, last year, during the holidays at Marlotte, Jacques and I were amusing ourselves with the gloves. I taught him how to box, you know. I used to be very keen about it, and people said that I was rather good. We started sparring just for fun. Suddenly he got me! We began again. He got me once more! I recovered and went for him. No time, he'd got me! The devil, thought I, this boy's not going to get the better of me! I tried for a straight, he parried the attack and got me again. Finally I had to shout for mercy. I was no longer the stronger of the two. Do you grasp the meaning of that? That youngster had got the better of me! It was a curious feeling. The pupil had become the master. It was queer. I was proud, pleased, because that was what I really wanted. I had carried my son farther than myself. I had done everything in my power to make him better than I was. Still, my vanity suffered because I had done exactly what I wanted. In a word, I had succeeded. Youth acquires such assurance

at a moment like that! It's all right for them to surpass you, but it's not all right for them to realise it. After the sparring surprise, I was on my guard. And now, often, at meals for instance, I suddenly listen to myself talking and I catch the boy's eyes fixed upon me and I feel embarrassed. Sometimes my eyes meet his . . . there is no unkindness there, but there is no indulgence. It is a glance that judges . . . and . . . I stop talking. I begin to think that he probably knows much more than I do about the subject, and that if he chose to argue he could get the better of me just as he did at boxing. And I, who used to take childish delight in my flowery phrases, now I hesitate and lose my assurance and don't dare to continue. . . . I feel uncomfortable. Do you understand, Dureux?

Dureux (*bursting*): It's awful! I know that Jacques . . .

Pelissier: You know that Jacques . . . ?

Dureux: I know that he adores you. Can't you see how much he is like you?

Pelissier: No.

Dureux: He is . . . you, all over again! Your voice, your laugh. Why, that gesture. . . . (PELISSIER *has just rubbed the side of his nose with the back of his finger.*) Even that gesture. . . .

Pelissier: What gesture?

Dureux: He does that, too! And your laugh is extraordinary. It is exactly like his.

Pelissier: Not really? Is he like me? But, good Lord, exterior signs don't count. Results of living together. People catch each other's expressions. One keeps the rest to oneself. Jacques laughs as I do, does he? But do you know what he thinks?

Dureux: He thinks as you do, sir, exactly as you do.

Pelissier: Nonsense! During the election for our district deputy, we went together to vote. I voted for Lucien Bernard, he voted for Mercereau!

Dureux: My father used to say: "If a man at twenty is not somewhat of an anarchist, he lacks guts; if a man at forty is not somewhat of a reactionary, he lacks intelligence!"

Pelissier: Did your father say that, Dureux? (*Reflecting.*) "If a man at twenty. . . ." It is true. At forty a man. . . . Well, when I was Jacques' age, let's see. . . . Yes, I was a red! That was the time I went to the Brasserie in the rue Cadet, with Charvet and the Ami du Peuple . . .

Dureux: In those days you, too, would have voted for Mercereau.

Pelissier: I have changed a lot.

Dureux: You have turned into a disgusting capitalist!

Pelissier (*gaily*): A disgusting capitalist with no capital. . . . The Bader Bank plucked a few of my feathers!

Dureux: Big feathers, sir?

Pelissier: My prettiest feathers. (*Quickly.*) Don't tell Jacques.

Dureux (*smiling*): Of course not, sir.

Pelissier: Seriously, Dureux, that is in confidence.

Dureux: And you complain of his silence!

Pelissier: What? Why should I tell him?

Dureux: One confidence deserves another. If you confided in him he would tell you about his fiancée.

Pelissier: What difference does it make whether I confide in him or not? He is bound to tell me sooner or later that he wants to get married.

Dureux: It hurts you that he hasn't told you already?

Pelissier: What hurts me, Dureux, is his attitude of indifference, his estrangement from me. There are times in everyone's life when things go wrong and we need someone to encourage us. It does us good to confess that we are really no cleverer than anybody else! You see, after we've confessed, if we've been listened to properly and understood and sympathised with by the right person . . . well, afterwards we know that we are cleverer than anybody else!

Dureux: He probably feels exactly as you do. (*Timidly.*) Won't you talk to him?

Pelissier: What can I say?

Dureux: Tell him what you have just told me. You are actually talking to him now! You are talking to him through me.

Pelissier: You are an understanding fellow, aren't you? But I have tried . . . often!

Dureux: Have you?

Pelissier: I try every day. I continually find some pretext or another to come in here. Now and then I pretend that I want to borrow his newspapers. I sit down. I wait for a bit. Then I push off. I go back to my work.

Dureux: He is studying hard at the moment—that makes him a bit restless. You probably come in at the wrong moment, or. . . .

Pelissier: Probably. (*A pause.*)

Dureux: In a way you've already started talking to him. Couldn't you come back again presently? Ask him for his paper and. . . .

Pelissier: I have already asked for it. (*He shows the newspaper sticking out of his pocket. Suddenly he listens. He has heard* JACQUES' *steps in the hall. Signs to* DUREUX *and crosses quickly to the mezzotint hanging on the wall.*) It's good, you know. (JACQUES *enters.* PELISSIER *does not turn round*). They are making excellent mezzotints now. Values are very right. Their yellow is a bit dark. Yellow doesn't lend itself very well, that's always a weak point. . . . Well, I must leave you. When are you coming to lunch, Dureux? (*He has quietly taken the newspaper out of his pocket.*)

Dureux: Whenever you like, sir.

Pelissier: Jacques, what day would you like?

Jacques: I don't care.

Pelissier (*roughly*): Can't you fix a day?

Jacques: I tell you that I don't care.

Pelissier (*crossly to* DUREUX): What about Tuesday?

Dureux (*embarrassed*): Tuesday. . . .

Pelissier: Yes.

Jacques: He is never free on Tuesdays.

Pelissier: Why is that?

Jacques: Always spends Tuesdays with his people.

Pelissier (*childishly*): What nonsense! Is that true?

Jacques: No, it is not true.

Pelissier: Why do you say that?

Jacques: Why do you ask?

Pelissier (*annoyed and uncomfortable*): Well, fix it up together. Good-bye, Dureux.

Dureux: Good-bye, sir.

While JACQUES' *back is turned,* PELISSIER *has hesitatingly put his newspapers down on the table. Exit* PELISSIER.

Dureux (*taking out his watch*): A quarter to five! Well, what about that letter?

Jacques: What letter?

Dureux: Your letter.

Jacques: You haven't time now. Henriette is waiting for you.

Dureux: Don't sulk. Read your letter to me. Come on! (JACQUES *has opened a book. He is*

reading and has not replied.) Lord, what a rotten disposition! If I were as bad-tempered as you, my lad, for a long time past we wouldn't have been speaking to each other. You ought to try to behave a little more like a human being. (*Silence from* JACQUES.) Do you suppose your father didn't understand why you rushed off just now?

Jacques: It is a quarter to five.

Dureux: Right oh. Good-bye. (*At the door.*) Look here!

Jacques: What?

Dureux: You guessed right. That Bader business. . . .

Jacques: Well?

Dureux: He lost a lot of money.

Jacques: Did you talk to him about it?

Dureux: No. He talked to me.

Jacques: Did he?

Dureux: Of course, I needn't tell you that he asked me to keep it secret.

Jacques: So now he confides in you, does he?

Dureux: Judge for yourself.

Jacques (*his head in his book*): All right.

Dureux (*annoyed*): Good-bye.

Jacques (*without moving*): Good-bye.

Duseux (*hesitates and then bursts out*): If you didn't behave with your father as you do, he wouldn't confide in outsiders like me. (*Silence from* JACQUES.) You'd better look out. Believe me, there'll come a time when you will be sorry

for it. That kind of regret hurts. . . . (JACQUES *doesn't move or speak.* DUREUX, *to give himself countenance, turns over the leaves of a book lying on the table.*) You really adore your father.

Jacques: Be careful of my Constitutional Code, please!

Dureux: He's your hero, you worship him. You're very careful not to let him guess it. I know all about it, I did just the same with my father. He did not know me at all. He used to come to my room sometimes to chat with my friends just like yours does. He used to tell them stories about his life, and he would order the servants to give us a damn fine tea. My friends were delighted; it flattered them! But I used to pull at their sleeves and sign to them to keep quiet, to drop the conversation. I used to think that the whole of my life was before me, and that I'd plenty of time to listen to my father. . . . (*A pause.* JACQUES, *who has slouched down in his arm-chair, stiffens almost imperceptibly.*) He has been dead for five years now. For five years nothing has happened to me, good or bad, that in imagination I haven't rushed to him with it. I'm constantly in need of explaining to him what I am, what I've done, what's happened to me: "Father, I have been thinking this. . . . I've done that. . . . I've seen so and so. . . ." I make him a part of my development. When I first met Henriette I often caught myself talking

to him about her! "You see, Father, she is . . ." I wanted him to meet her, to know her. I am conscious all the time that I owe my life to him, and that it would have interested him. (*He sits down.*) When fathers are hanging about we hardly ever notice them. Afterwards, we never forget them. (*A pause.*) There's something I dream almost every night. In form, sense, details, naturally, it is incoherent and it varies, but the sense of it is always the same. I dream that my father is with me, that I have been separated from him for a long time, and that at last I am going to be near him. I shall be able to touch him, to see his rather frightening eyes again, only they will no longer frighten me. I need to take just one step . . . he is there. At the second when I am about to reach him, something comes between us—some movement—some cloud, and it is finished. I have lost him. Sometimes I dream I have an appointment to meet him somewhere at a specific time. I am in a hurry, but my body is made of cotton-wool, time is passing, I try to run, I seem to be walking in water and it presses on my chest. I make a terrible effort! . . . (*He gets up, a pause.*) Of course, I never get to the place of rendezvous.

Jacques: I didn't need you to interfere before making an attempt to talk to my father.

Dureux: Have you tried?

Jacques: Yes. Sometimes I feel lonely and I

can't study. I get discouraged, no energy. I go and sit in his studio, but he is absent-minded and absorbed in his work, so I give it up and come back here. I open my book and I try to work again.

Dureux: You probably choose just the moment when he is busy!

Jacques: Fool! Do you suppose I choose the moments!

Dureux: Then when he comes here to you, why are you not a little more civil to him? Why don't you keep him with you? . . . Talk to him?

Jacques (surly): Talk to him about what?

Dureux: Let him see that you're interested in what he is doing. Talk to him about the building of his hotel, for instance.

Jacques: That would be clever, wouldn't it? Then what?

Dureux: Then talk to him about yourself. Tell him about Yvonne. Nothing would please him more. Do you know what you ought to do? Instead of reading that letter from Yvonne to me, you should go and read it to him. Go on, go and read it to him.

Jacques: Rot!

Dureux: No! Not just now. . . . He might think I had put you up to it! Go and ask him how his hotel is coming on. Do you hear?

Jacques: You bore me! Mind your own business.

Dureux: Well, I'm off. Good-bye. Give me a ring.

Jacques (*calling him back*) : See here !

Dureux : What ?

Jacques : Say good-bye to him before you go.

Dureux : No, I won't. It's five o'clock.

Jacques : All right, all right ! Get out.

Exit DUREUX.

JACQUES *is left alone. He remains motionless for a moment, dreaming. He rubs the side of his nose with the back of his forefinger. Then suddenly making up his mind, he opens the drawer, takes out Yvonne's letter and deliberately goes towards the door. He tries to open it, but it seems to stick. He pulls hard on it. It opens.* PELISSIER *is behind.*

Jacques : Oh !

Pelissier : I came to ask you to lend me your newspaper. Are you going out ?

Jacques : No, I am not.

Pelissier : Are you dining at home ?

Jacques : Yes. Will you . . . won't you come in ?

Pelissier : Yes . . . yes . . . if you want me to.

Short silence. Neither dares to speak.

Jacques : Have you a lot of work on at the moment ?

Pelissier (*carelessly*) : Rather a lot, yes. . . . (*Gravely.*) I like your friend Dureux.

Jacques: Yes . . . still busy on your hotel plans?

Pelissier: No. . . . (*Following up his thought.*) Damnably intelligent.

Jacques: Aren't they finished yet?

Pelissier: What?

Jacques: Your hotel plans?

Pelissier: Yes, of course. He is a nice fellow . . . has great charm. I can't tell you how much I approve of him!

Jacques: They are finished? When is the building to start?

Pelissier: I don't know. We chatted together like old friends. We talked a lot about you.

Jacques: I thought you were pressed for time.

Pelissier: Pressed for time? Dureux and me?

Jacques: No. You are not listening to me.

Pelissier: What do you mean? Not listening to you?

Jacques: I am talking to you about your hotel.

Pelissier: For goodness' sake, drop my hotel.

Jacques: Isn't it to be opened in October?

Pelissier: That is very possible.

Jacques: Are you bored with my talking about it?

Pelissier: You're as stubborn as a mule! I am talking to you about Dureux.

Jacques: Oh, I see, all right.

Pelissier: Real friendship is rare. Somebody who understands . . . to whom you can talk. . . . It is a positive need, don't you think?

Jacques : Yes.

Pelissier : Dureux seems to be very fond of you. (*Short silence.*) Do you hear me ?

Jacques : Yes, I hear you.

Pelissier : Are you bored with my talking about Dureux ?

Jacques : Not in the least.

Pelissier : Why do you sit there like that ? Have you nothing to say for yourself ?

Jacques : What on earth do you want me to say ? You have just told me that Dureux is fond of me.

Pelissier (*disconcerted*) *:* Well ?

Jacques : Well, I am listening to you.

Pelissier : That's a nice way to listen !

Jacques : Why do you shut me up when I talk to you about your work or about your business ?

Pelissier : I . . . shut you up ?

Jacques : I asked you for information about your hotel George the Second. It is something you're keen on. Why don't you answer me ?

Pelissier : You're always interested in things just at the wrong moment.

Jacques : I might say the same to you.

Pelissier : What on earth do you want to know about the hotel George the Second, anyway ?

Jacques : Nothing. It doesn't matter.

Pelissier : Don't be so disagreeable.

Jacques : I'm not.

Pelissier (*growing angry*) *:* You are. It's no

use trying to talk to you. You either get annoyed or offended.

Jacques: Just at the moment you seem to be the one who is getting offended. I haven't said a thing.

Pelissier: But you have looked a lot.

Jacques: Whose fault was that?

Pelissier: Not mine.

Jacques: Of course it was. Whenever I go to see you, whenever I talk to you about anything that interests me, you pay no attention to me!

Pelissier: I came to see you.

Jacques: Only because I asked you to come in.

Pelissier (heatedly): I came into this room on purpose to talk to you.

Jacques: You came to get a newspaper.

Pelissier: I'm lying, am I?

Jacques: I was just going to see you. I wanted to tell you that. . . .

Pelissier: Answer me! Am I lying?

Jacques: I say I wanted to. . . .

Pelissier: And I am not asking what you wanted. I am asking what happened: did I come here to see you or did I not?

Jacques: I have not said that you didn't come here, but you didn't come to see me!

Pelissier: How do you know that I didn't?

Jacques: Did you come here to see me?

Pelissier (very angrily): How many times do you want me to tell you so! Stop looking so

sceptical. Do you hear me? I will not allow you to doubt what I say. I won't tolerate such behaviour! Where are you going?

Jacques (*darkly*): I don't know. I'm just going.

Pelissier: You may as well. Go along out, my boy. Go on, go on, get out!

Jacques: Damn! I was sure of it. It is always the same. Good-night. (*Exit.*)

The door bangs, PELISSIER *is left alone. His anger dies. His face relaxes, he caves in. Suddenly he is only a rather sad old man. His eyes are moist. There is a pause. The door opens. He jumps up and furtively wipes away a tear from the corner of one of his eyes.* JACQUES *has re-entered and pretends to be looking for something.* PELISSIER *turns away in order to hide his face.*

Pelissier: What's the matter? Why haven't you gone yet?

Jacques: I'm just going. (*Meanwhile he looks at his father, who carefully keeps his back turned to him and goes up to the window. He looks at his father's back, meditates, and then makes a great effort.*) I can prove to you that I was going to see you, to talk to you, that I had something to tell you. . . . I was going to tell you that . . . I . . . am in love . . . with a young girl, and that I . . . I . . . (*He stammers, embarrassed.*) A

young girl who . . . a young girl . . . who . . . that . . . who . . . well, who. . . .

Pelissier (*helping him out*): I know. Shut up. I want to say something to you. Come here. (*He turns round and holds out his arms to him.* JACQUES *runs into his arms.*) You boy!

CURTAIN

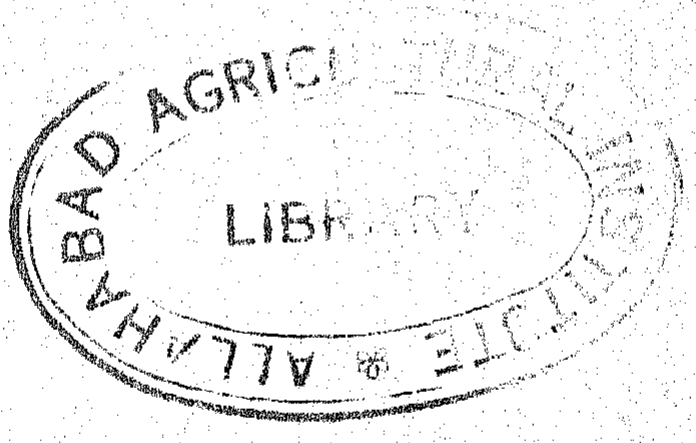
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THE MAP

E. V. DAVENPORT AND DOROTHY MARGARET STUART



CHARACTERS

THE PAINTER

THE STRANGER

THE CITIZEN

THE LADY

THE WAITING-WOMAN

SCENE : *An Artist's studio in Louvain.*

PERIOD : *The fifteenth century, during the war between the Burgundians and the Saxons.*

THE MAP

SCENE : *An artist's studio. Model's platform left, cupboard extreme left, casement window centre, door right. Right centre a canopied chair, over which a long mantle is draped. Pointed roofs visible through the window show that the studio is on the upper floor of a three-storied building. Left centre, with his back to the audience, the painter stands at his easel, his face turned towards the model's platform, on which is a rough wooden framework resembling a large gridiron. He has his palette on his left thumb and a brush in his right hand. His leather tunic is much stained with paint, and he wears a red cap.*

The Painter : All the plagues of Pharaoh upon that rascal of mine ! Here's the first bright morning we've had for a week, and he must needs run off to see a spy hanged ! How the devil can I paint St. Lawrence on his gridiron without a model ? And the Abbot grows impatient. (*He stands aside, revealing the canvas on the easel. The finished picture will represent a dead man, recumbent on a barred framework, surrounded by Roman soldiers, but the figures are as yet only vaguely indicated in broad outline.*) Spies ! You hear of nothing but

spies now. If the Saxons were half as clever as we think they are they'd have beaten Burgundy long ago. War! Foolish business, war. Keeps quiet folk wakeful o' nights. Won't let a poor painter get on with his work. Sends up the price of vermilion and ultramarine. (*He strides to and fro.*) And there's my model legging off to watch 'em string up the poor devil they caught last night! Won't dare show his face again to-day, I'll wager. I'd burn a twelve-ounce candle to St. Lawrence—good white wax, not stinking tallow stuff—if he'd send me someone to lie yonder and be a dead saint for half an hour. (*Stands back to measure painting with brush. Mutters.*) No! it's no good; I can't get it this morning.

Pause. A man's face, white and haggard, appears outside the window, a man's hand pulls the casement open—he is clinging with the other to the broad ledge outside. The easel hides him from the painter, who does not see him till a moment later he clambers over the ledge and drops heavily into the room.

The Painter (*grappling with him*): God in heaven, who are you? A spy, a spy!

The Stranger: For God's love—I am no spy.

The Painter (*still clutching him*): No spy! Do honest men crawl through honest men's windows

—Ah! (*He catches sight of a manacle with a broken chain on the stranger's wrist.*)—or bear such toys upon them?

The Stranger (*panting*): They—they caught me last night. (*A wild tumult is heard at a distance, drawing gradually closer.*) They—they're after me now. Hide me—for the love of Heaven!

The Painter (*slowly*): Oho! And *if* I hide you there will be no hanging, and my rascal will have lost his morning's pay for nothing! Stay—I have it! You will make a perfect corpse.

The Stranger (*appalled*): A—perfect—corpse?

The Painter (*hustling him left*): Here—quick—off with your doublet! Lie down there—you are a saint—you are St. Lawrence—you are dead!

The Stranger (*enlightened by a glance at the easel, and somewhat reassured*): A painter!

The Painter: Dirk Pellerin, Master Painter to the Abbey of St. Lawrence—at your service.

The Stranger (*in a tone of recognition, as he divests himself of his doublet*): Dirk—Dirk Pellerin!

The Painter: The same. Now lie down—your friends are hot on your trail.

He goes over to the still half-open window and looks down. From the noise it is obvious that an angry crowd is surging past.

A Voice (*below*): Neighbour—neighbour Dirk, have you seen the spy?

The Painter: Keep the pose, please! Your head where it was. So! Not a Saxon. Not in Saxon pay?

The Stranger (*trying to keep the pose, and yet speaking with great earnestness*): By every saint in heaven, *no*!

The Painter: Ah!

He holds up his brush, perpendicularly, to get a parallel line.

The Stranger (*anxiously*): You do not believe me?

The Painter: Not yet. And if I don't believe you an hour from now—when I shall have finished with you—there will be plenty of time for the hanging still.

The Stranger: Then I shall cease to be a saint, and continue to be a dead man?

The Painter (*amused*): Exactly. (*He pauses a moment in his work.*) Now, see here, messire! (*The* STRANGER *starts.*) Yes—keep the pose, I pray you—I guessed that you were a knight, and you cannot say that I guessed wrong. See here! Is it true that when the guard caught you trying to scale the city wall last night they found on you a map of the city?

The Stranger (*defiantly*): They did.

The Painter: Ah! With a mark to show the secret postern leading into the castle?

The Stranger (*still defiantly*) : That is also true.

The Painter (*resuming his painting*) : And another mark—with the words, "No archers here"—against the wall ?

The Stranger (*resentfully*) : That is what I cannot understand. I counted a hundred paces west of the north gate—and there were archers—five of them—there.

The Painter : Someone in the city sent you that map, messire. Some spy. Some traitor.

The Stranger (*indignantly*) : No such thing !

The Painter : It was not sent to you by some one within our gates ?

The Stranger : That map—if map it can be called—was sent to me——

He pauses, biting his lip.

The Painter : H'm, yes. I heard—keep the pose, I pray you—I heard that you had refused to answer any questions about that person.

The Stranger : I did, and I do. You can hand me over to the hangman if you will—but no word will I say.

The Painter : So be it. Don't writhe, messire ! You are a dead man—for the time being.

The Stranger (*slightly reassured*) : Only for the time being ! Then you are not going to——

The Painter : We'll see. You make a good corpse—and not a bad saint. My rascal had rather

too much belly on him. And the line of your jaw is excellent.

The Stranger: You honour me, Master Painter.

The Painter: What is troubling me is this. I cannot paint all the morning, because a certain demoiselle is coming here to give orders for a new mass-book. When she is gone maybe the daylight will have gone, too. Shall I turn you out before she comes——?

The Stranger (*alarmed*): Turn me out? For the love of God, good Master Painter—with this fetter on my wrist, too!

The Painter (*continuing*): Or hide you in my inner chamber till after—till dusk—when you might get clear away?

The Stranger: Truly, good Master Dirk, if you will not help me I am a lost man! I have been in Louvain but once before—and I have but one friend within these walls—if, indeed, I have even *one*.

The Painter: A Luxemburger, are you not, messire?

The Stranger: How did you know?

The Painter: By your speech. And by the fashion of your doublet. Well, the Luxemburgers are honest folk, and allies of our good Duke. There were three or four very valiant Luxemburg knights at the tournament of the Golden Fleece a year ago come Martinmas.

The Stranger: You saw the jousting, then?

The Painter: Nay—I have little leisure for such sport. But I heard—I heard much. They said the good Duke loved these Luxemburger knights well—and the ladies—it was said that one of them would return and wed the fairest of all the ladies.

The Stranger: "It was said." Did he not return, then?

The Painter: It seems he did not. The lady is still unwed. And they say her father——

He pauses.

The Stranger (prompting): Her father——

The Painter: They say he has given orders to his archers to seize this Luxemburger knight if ever he shows his face here again.

The Stranger: "His archers." Then her father is—some great captain? The Seneschal of the Castle, perhaps?

The Painter: Speech is a good hound, but silence is a better. His archers, did I say? I meant his grooms (*repeating for emphasis*)—his *grooms.*

The Stranger: And why are his—*grooms*—to seize this unlucky Luxemburger?

The Painter: Because—keep the pose, I pray—because he did not come back.

The Stranger: It is a little difficult. He is to be punished for not coming when he *does* come.

The Painter: For not coming when he *said* he would.

The Stranger: Nobody happened to suggest that he failed to come because the lady sent him away and she would have none of him?

The Painter (*cautiously*): Nobody suggested that in *my* hearing. But it *may* have been so.

The Stranger (*with conviction*): It may.

The Painter (*looking steadily at him*): And the lady may have changed her mind again—a thing that ladies have been known to do ere now—and she may have sent him word to come secretly—for fear of her father's——

The Stranger: *Grooms*, Master Dirk, *grooms*.

The Painter (*assenting*): Grooms. Then if once he were here—his peace—and hers—could be made with her noble father. It sounds possible. It sounds very possible.

The Stranger (*half aside*): It *did* sound possible, very. (*Aloud.*) You have a speculative mind, my friend. You ought to have been a Dominican Friar.

The Painter (*complacently*): Yes, I have always thought that my wits were wasted. Our citizens, good, fat-pated fellows—they have no more brains than the round, red cheeses they love so well. By the way, messire—stay, your head more to the left—I am sorry if I irk you——

The Stranger: I owe you this—and more.

The Painter (*resuming*): I thought—when I

told you my name—that you seemed to have heard it before.

The Stranger: Many men have heard of you.

The Painter: Doubtless. But *you*?

The Stranger: You painted a votive panel for——

He checks himself hastily.

The Painter: For the friend who sent you that map—if map it can be called?

The Stranger (*disconcerted*): I did not say that.

The Painter: Fear nothing. You have satisfied me that you are no spy. Maybe you can satisfy the citizens, too. But—if you had not satisfied me—and if you had not spoken of that votive panel——

The Stranger: If I had not?

The Painter: I might have hazarded a guess that that map was a ruse—a trap.

The Stranger (*startled*): Never! That could not be!

The Painter: I am not so sure. Whoever drew that map must have known that the unguarded stretch of the city wall lies east and not west of the north gate. Must have known *that*, surely.

There is a knock on the door. The STRANGER *jumps violently. The* PAINTER *flings down his palette and brushes and catches up the mantle*

from the chair, and throws it over the STRANGER, *hiding him completely.*

The Painter (*in a whisper*) : Hush—lie still. Fear nothing.

He goes to the door, right, and opens it cautiously. A waiting-woman of severe aspect, in a black gown and a white hood, appears.

The Waiting-woman : Master Dirk—my young lady is below. She would have speech with you.

The Painter : Beg the demoiselle to honour me by ascending. I have some designs ready to show her.

The WAITING-WOMAN *withdraws, and the* STRANGER *thrusts his head anxiously from beneath his draperies.*

The Stranger : Ye saints ! Master Dirk—you cannot—you cannot let a lady come *here—now*—send her away—let me go—quick !

The Painter (*firmly pulling the cloak over his head and so drowning his protests*) : Hush ! Lie still—she need never know !

The LADY *enters, followed by her* WAITING-WOMAN. *The* PAINTER *bows low to her, and, with a respectful gesture, indicates the canopied*

chair, upon which she seats herself, letting fall from her shoulders a long cloak lined with miniver.

The Lady: You are hard at work? I have come at an unlucky hour?

The Painter: You could come at no such hour, mademoiselle. It is true that I have been working upon my altar-piece for the Abbey—the winter daylight is brief, and the Abbot grows impatient—but my model has failed me this morning. I am at your service.

The LADY *moves her head so that she can see the canvas on the easel. The central figure is still only vaguely sketched, but the moulding of the head and the main lines of the face can now be discerned.*

The Lady (*in a puzzled voice*): Your model—I remember him—he was St. Martin, was he not—and Julius Cæsar? He does not look the same. I—I seem to have seen your St. Lawrence somewhere—*not* in a picture—and not long ago.

At the sound of her voice the STRANGER *peers out from beneath the cloak. When he sees her face he cowers under its folds again.*

The Painter (*evasively*): I am infinitely honoured

that you should remember my St. Martin—and my Julius Cæsar.

The Lady: And the St. Margaret you painted —for me. My very own Saint. I must have her in my missal. With St. Remy.

The PAINTER *goes to the cupboard between the door right and the front of the stage, and brings out some sheets of parchment.*

The Lady: I might have been here earlier, Master Dirk—but we had to go the longest way round—by the ramparts. I heard they were hanging a poor prisoner this morning. God have mercy on his soul!

She crosses herself compassionately. The STRANGER *peers out again.*

The Painter: Ah—to be sure. No sight for a lady's eyes. A tumble in the lists, now—*that's* the thing for *them.* I've heard of many a one that would faint at the sight of a spider and yet would look on very calmly while the blood flowed in the lists.

The Lady: So would not *I,* Master Dirk.

The Painter: Surely not, mademoiselle. All ladies are not so cold-hearted—though many ladies' hearts are cold. Why, last Martinmas, when the Duke held his jousts here, there was a

lady who wept when one of the knights was a little hurt. A Luxemburger knight, I think he was.

The Lady (*averting her face*) : And *she* ?

The Painter : Of her I can tell you nothing, mademoiselle—except that men said that she was very fair. And now—pardon my prating, and vouchsafe to look at these sketches for your next book. St. Margaret—with her dragon at her feet—and St. Remy, in his cope and mitre.

She glances, but without much apparent interest, at the sketches he places in her hands. He takes the opportunity, when her head is bent, to make a sign to the stranger to conceal himself again—a sign promptly obeyed.

The Lady : These are good. (*With a sudden change of tone.*) Master Dirk.

The Painter (*as she pauses*) : Mademoiselle ?

The Lady : That *is* the Inn of the Three Unicorns opposite this house, is it not ?

The Painter : The Three Unicorns, yes.

The Lady : Any traveller entering by the north gate would be likely to lodge there ?

The Painter : Surely, mademoiselle. (*Continuing to show her designs.*) This border—strawberries—fruit and blossom—roses—snails—caterpillars. Look at that caterpillar long enough and you will think you see him crawling out of the book.

The Lady : I should not like *that* at *all*. I must take care never to look too long. (*Changing the*

subject abruptly.) If a—a—stranger had come last night—and lodged in the Three Unicorns—would you be likely to know of it?

The Painter: Strangers come thither so often that their coming makes little stir—unless they be strangers of no common sort.

The Lady: If—If it *were* a stranger of no common sort?

The STRANGER *peers out again. The* PAINTER *is looking keenly at the* LADY, *whose eyes are fixed on the parchment leaf in her hand.*

The Painter: Maybe I should hear. My model is hail-fellow-well-met with all the tapsters in the town. But strangers are not much liked in these days. You see, plain, honest folk often mistake a plain, honest stranger for a spy. Now, that poor wretch whom they caught last night——

The Lady (*startled*)*:* Last night? Was he caught *last night*—the man whom they are hanging this morning?

The Painter: Yes, mademoiselle. Caught scaling the city wall—caught beyond the north gate—with a map of the city on him.

The Lady: Jesu! (*She leans back in the chair, overwhelmed. The* PAINTER *is pretending to notice nothing. The* STRANGER'S *face is a study in conflicting emotions. After a pause, in a strangled voice.*) They are hanging him—to-day—at this very moment——

The Painter: In point of fact, mademoiselle, they are *not.*

The Lady (*blanching*): It is over—already?

The Painter: Not exactly. The—er—the "poor wretch" escaped.

The Lady (*with a shuddering sigh of relief*): Escaped! (*A thought strikes her.*) But they may catch him still?

The Painter: They have not caught him yet.

His emphatic tone puzzles her, and she looks at him earnestly, with her clenched hands at her throat.

The Lady: Not *yet*? You are *sure*?

The Painter: I am sure.

The Lady: But they may.

The Painter: That is as God will. The—the poor wretch may find a friend—someone may hide him—though, of course, if he was a spy——

The Lady (*blurting it out*): He was *not* a spy!

The Painter (*feigning astonishment*): *Not* a spy?

The Lady (*desperately*): Oh, Master Dirk, good Master Dirk, you must think me mad—but if—as I think—if this man—ah, how can I explain?

The Painter (*gently*): Mademoiselle, trust me. You can safely trust me. Bethink you—I painted you kneeling behind your noble father in an altar-piece when you were but a little lady indeed.

The Lady: I *will*—I *do*—trust you. But it seems so difficult—it sounds so strange.

The Painter: It had occurred to me—forgive me, mademoiselle, if I speak my thoughts—it *had* occurred to me that this stranger might be no Saxon spy, but an honourable knight of Luxemburg.

The Lady: Of Luxemburg? For God's love, what makes you say *that*?

The Painter: His speech. His was no Saxon speech.

The Lady: His speech! You have seen him, then?

The Painter: Seen—and heard—and that not long since.

The Lady (*clasping her hands*): Oh, where, *where*?

The Painter (*evading the question*): He is safe—for the moment. He would have been safe last night—if he had been willing to tell why he came hither, and who sent him that unlucky map.

The Lady: Truly, an unlucky map, since to carry it put a brave man's neck in peril of the noose!

The Painter: Not only that. There was something more.

The Lady (*distressed*): Something—ah, *what*?

The Painter: According to this map, there was a point west of the north gate—where no archers would be posted after dusk.

The Lady: Yes, yes!

The Painter: Well, that *did* suggest treachery.

Why should an honest man want to enter over the wall instead of through the gate? (*The* STRANGER *makes as if to rise, and then thinks the better of it.*) But the point where no archers were likely to be—*that* point was *east* and not *west* of the north gate.

The Lady: *East*—not *west*! Oh, God! And I, who could never tell one from the other!

The Painter: Someone—the sender of the map—deceived him to whom it was sent. Deceived him wittingly. Perhaps—if he *was*—saving your presence—he *was* a spy—some loyal citizen lured him to his death.

The Lady: No, no—not wittingly—and he was no spy!

The Painter (*seeming not to heed her*): Yet who knows the truth of these things?

The Lady (*in a ringing voice*): I do!

The Painter: You, mademoiselle?

The Lady: Yes, I—most unhappy that I am!

The Painter: Then he was——

The Lady: Messire Remy de Bauffremont. He came—because I bade him come!

The STRANGER, *clutching the cloak round him, is rising slowly to his knees.*

The Painter: You bade him come?

The Lady: I wanted to prove him—I wanted to be sure.

The Painter: Why, then, his neck is safe, and all is well!

The Lady: But my father——

The Painter: I think your noble father can be soothed. And Messire Remy likewise.

The Lady: Messire Remy?

The Painter: Surely, mademoiselle, since he was bidden to scale the wall west instead of east of the north gate—and thereby tumbled straight into the arms of the guard.

The Lady: Alas, that miserable map!

The Painter: An unlucky map, indeed!

The Stranger (*springing forward, draped in the mantle*): Not so—not unlucky—a thousand times no! (*The* LADY *shrinks back.*) Marguerite!

The Lady: Remy.

The STRANGER *takes her into his arms.*

The Painter: And so I lose my model for St. Lawrence!

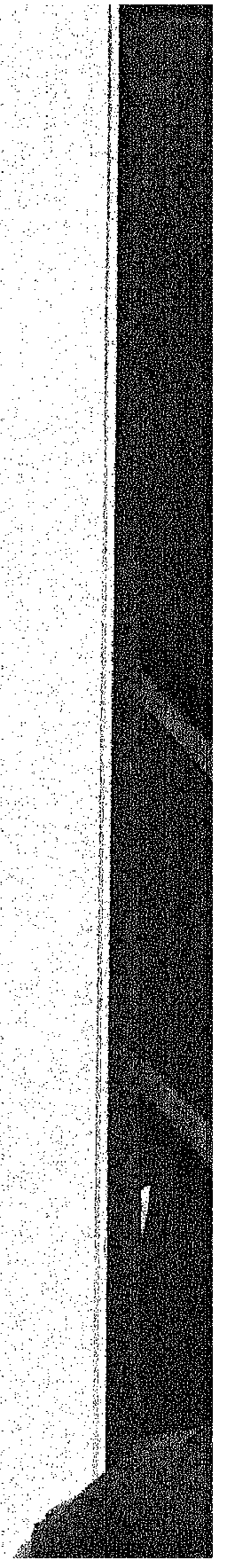
The Stranger (*still holding the lady in his arms*): I fear so, Master Dirk—and very grateful I am to be neither a dead man—nor a Saint!

CURTAIN

Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs. James B. Pinker and Son, Talbot House, Arundel Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

A FAMILY COMEDY (1840)

MARJORIE BOWEN



First produced at The Coliseum, London, on March 17th, 1930.

CHARACTERS

MR. JOHN PORTER, *a Tea Merchant.*

MRS. JOHN PORTER, *his Wife.*

MISS EMILY PORTER, *his Sister.*

MR. HENRY PORTER, *his Son.*

MISS MATILDA PORTER, *his elder Daughter.*

MISS MARIA PORTER, *his younger Daughter.*

MISS SARAH SPEED, *his Son's Fiancée.*

SCENE : Islington.

PERIOD : 1840.

A FAMILY COMEDY

SCENE: *A Parlour in* MR. PORTER'S *House in Islington. Early morning. Spring. Window stage* C, *backing showing railings and trees beyond; a door* R. *and a door up* L.; *a round mahogany table with a wool mat and a group of wax fruit under a glass case in the middle; down* L. *a fireplace with mirror above and screen in front, a chair either side; above the door* R. *a heavy sideboard; on walls some dark oil paintings.*

MRS. PORTER *is seated at* L. *of the table* C. *turning over the pages of a large Bible with one hand and holding a handkerchief to her eyes with the other; she is a comely woman of not much more than* 40, *but her lace matron's cap, her dark dress, cashmere shawl, braided hair, etc., make her appear twenty years older. She has been crying violently and is still sniffing; she turns over the Book for consolation and reads between her sobs.*

Mrs Porter: "The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who shall know it?" True, how true! (*Wiping her eyes.*)

MR. PORTER *enters from the door* R.—*a big, vigorous man of* 45 *or so, in precise morning attire. Agitation shows beneath a manner which has been so correct for so many years as to become mechanical, and emotion tinges but does not disturb a lifelong air of undisturbed authority; he is whiskered, dominant, prosperous and God-fearing.*

Mr. Porter (*approaching* R. *of the table* C.): Tears, my dear, tears? (MRS. PORTER *sobs louder.*) I hardly expected this—I observed that Henry left the house just now—violently. (*A short pause.* MRS. PORTER *buries her face in her handkerchief.*) You have been harsh with him.

Mrs. Porter (*reproachfully*): *You* were harsh with him last night—harsh indeed!

Mr. Porter: I exercised authority. I performed my duty. I expressed pain, surprise, displeasure.

Mrs. Porter (*the same*): And when I endeavoured to restrain you, you begged me not to meddle with matters beyond the judgment of a female!

Mr. Porter: Precisely. And you have disobeyed me, Clara. I have thought the matter over and have decided to forgive Henry—but when I look for the lad I find him driven from the house by your unwomanly reproaches.

Mrs. Porter (*aghast*): John! Unwomanly! Please listen——

Mr. Porter (*interrupting*): I refuse to listen.

(*Walking up* C. *and down again.*) I feared this. You are always so unreasonable, Clara. Last night you took his part, this morning you must open up the affair again.

Mrs. Porter: Open it up! Henry came to me——

Mr. Porter (*interrupting*): Of course, for consolation, for motherly tenderness, for feminine sympathy—he was agitated, naturally.

Mrs. Porter: Yes, by *your* reproaches, John; after all, if you may express your feelings, I suppose I may?

Mr. Porter: Certainly not. I am surprised, Clara, surprised. This is not the first time I have looked for sweetness, kindness, smiling patience in you. And failed to find it, Clara, failed to find it.

Mrs. Porter (*rising*): Please listen——

Mr. Porter (*with dignity*): No. I have refused to listen.

Mrs. Porter (*angrily*): You usually do. Indeed I cannot remember when you *have* listened to me, except when I was saying something wholly agreeable to you.

Mr. Porter: Ah! Accusing me of injustice, I suppose?

Mrs. Porter: *And* unreasonableness. Last night you were for turning Henry out of the house.

Mr. Porter (*inflamed*): Do you call that unreasonable? When a man of my principles finds

his only son has been drinking, gambling, and engaging in a clandestine love affair.

Mrs. Porter (*with dignity*) : I beg of you, John, *not* to use these coarse expressions before me. Henry had *only* had two glasses of port and lost fifteen shillings at dominoes.

Mr. Porter (*angrily*) : And secretly betrothed himself to his tailor's daughter—that's nothing, I suppose ?

Mrs. Porter : You see, you are losing your temper again about it—and yet *I* was not to say a word. Henry is *my* child, too. (*With handkerchief to her eyes.*) *I* have *my* feelings, I suppose.

Mr. Porter (*trying to control himself*) : It was *my* affair. Father and son. Perhaps I went a little too far last night. I don't pretend to be perfect.

Mrs. Porter (*weeping*) : How can you say that ! You always have !

Mr. Porter (*still trying to control himself*) : Not at all. I try to be reasonable. The boy did wrong, I—there was a regrettable scene, but he confessed. I've thought it over. I intend clemency, Clara, clemency. After all, I can recall my own youth.

Mrs. Porter (*looking up from handkerchief*) : Oh, John ! And I've always held you up as such an example to the children !

Mr. Porter (*exasperated*) : So I am, so I am—it is quite impossible to discuss these things with a female. That is what I complain of, Clara—your interference

Mrs. Porter: Interference! With my own children! The Bible says—— (*Majestically laying her hand on the Book.*)

Mr. Porter (*losing control and turning away*): The Bible is for Sunday—it's not real life.

Mrs. Porter (*aghast*): John! Oh!

Mr. Porter (*returning to table*): Well, not *English* life—you're continually telling me things out of the Bible to put me in the wrong, but there is a good deal there you wouldn't care for me to act on.

Mrs. Porter (*sobbing*): If you are going to blaspheme—what do you know of the Book? You always sleep in church—except for the hymns.

Mr. Porter: Exactly. A day of rest. I wish *you* slept in church, Clara, instead of listening to all you hear there and bringing it on into the week, which it was never meant for.

Mrs. Porter (*still sobbing*): Look where your inattention has brought you—if you hadn't slept through so many sermons you would not be behaving so *disgracefully* now.

Mr. Porter: You exasperate, Clara—you'll drive *me* out of the house as well as poor Henry. (*"The Turkish Patrol" is heard on the piano from next room.*) Isn't it very early for Maria to begin her practice?

Mrs. Porter (*still half weeping*): It is not. It is *you* who are late. Is it possible you are not going to the office?

Mr. Porter: It is. I am not. I remained at home to settle this unfortunate business with Henry—if you would have had the goodness to mind your affairs, my dear, all would have been amicably settled by now.

Mrs. Porter (*bridling*): Indeed. And how, pray? Do you mean, after what you said last night, you were going to overlook Henry's conduct?

Mr. Porter (*pompously*): I do. The boy is a good boy—he took a glass or two last night merely to give himself courage to face me.

Mrs. Porter: He needed it—your display of temper——

Mr. Porter (*in his most pompous manner*): Clara, be silent. I say I had decided to tell Henry he was forgiven—even to inform him that Miss Speed—I confess I was shocked, but, on reflection——

Mrs. Porter: After what you said about clandestine love affairs!

Mr. Porter: Let us be calm. The boy told me. He confessed very candidly.

Mrs. Porter (*with tearful pride*): *I* always trained him to be truthful.

Mr. Porter (*sharply*): A pity you didn't train him to be temperate and prudent.

Mrs. Porter: There! You say something different every time you speak.

Mr. Porter: You don't expect me to say the

same thing over and over again, Clara? You confuse me, you positively confuse me. (*With an effort.*) Speed is in a fair way of business, my own father was a clothier.

Mrs. Porter: Yes, remind me, Mr. Porter, of your obvious lack of gentility which I for twenty-five years of marriage have tried to forget.

Mr. Porter: And what do you suppose *I* have tried to forget? But you shan't provoke me. Sarah Speed is a modest, pleasant girl any woman might be proud of. ("*The Turkish Patrol*" *thumps more loudly.*) Need Maria continually play that piece?

Mrs. Porter: Continually, Mr. Porter, continually. She is to perform it at Miss Magnet's Academy on the fifteenth.

Mr. Porter: But I want to keep my head clear —I can't think while that—er—music—is going on. Pray, Clara, tell the child to cease.

Mrs. Porter (*hysterically*): No, indeed. I may be an unnatural mother, I may have turned my only son out of the house, I may be unwomanly —but I will *not* interrupt Maria's education because you have no ear for harmony!

Mr. Porter: So you exult in your atrocious conduct—you did turn the boy out of the house——

Mrs. Porter (*not heeding*): As if I hadn't noticed how you leave the room when I bring out my harp—you've no soul, no sentiment.

Mr. Porter (*shouting, as* "*The Turkish Patrol*"

stumbles along again) : Are you to tell her to stop, or shall I ?

MRS. PORTER *sails to door up* L. *and opens it. Music louder.*

Mrs. Porter (*with false calm*) : Maria ! Mar—ia !

Maria (*off, falsetto*) : Yes, Mamma !

Mrs. Porter (*with acid sweetness*) : Maria, my dear, please cease your practice, it disturbs your dear papa.

Maria (*off*) : Certainly, dear Mamma !

The music ceases. MRS. PORTER *closes door and returns to table,* C. MR. PORTER *has made a brave effort to compose himself.*

Mr. Porter (*pompously*) : If I have been hasty I regret it, as I hope, Clara, *you* regret your hastiness with Henry. From a woman, a mother, one expects a melting tenderness, a soft sympathy, an—er—an exquisite sensibility.

Mrs. Porter (*grimly*) : Qualities I trust I have never failed in, John.

Mr. Porter (*dryly*) : On the contrary, your lack of them, Clara, has led to the present distressing scene.

The door R. *opens and* MISS EMILY PORTER *puts in her head.*

Emily : Did I hear voices ?

Mr. Porter (*further annoyed at her appearance*) :

I hope, Emily, in *my* house you will never hear *voices.* (*Moving up* C..)

EMILY *enters. She is older than her brother and really as redoubtable, but her sex and the period are against her; even with these handicaps she holds her own. The cut of her features is in contradiction to the heavy decorum of her sombre attire. As she advances,* MRS. PORTER, *who has collapsed at* L. *of table again, makes an instant attempt to gain her as an ally.*

Mrs. Porter (*sobbing, with handkerchief at eyes*): Emily, you *did* hear *one* voice, that of your brother—raised against me!

EMILY *sweeps across to* L. *of* MRS. PORTER *and puts her arm round her, while she glares at* MR. PORTER.

Emily: John! A recurrence of the scene of last night! Have you no consideration for a mother's heart?

Mr. Porter (*moving down* R. *again*): A mother's heart! Don't talk nonsense—Clara has turned the boy out, abused him, reproached him, exulted in it, flown in my face, defied me.

Mrs. Porter (*rising*): Am I to endure this?

Emily: Certainly not—control yourself, John.

Mr. Porter (*raging*): Am I master here, or not? Is Henry my son or not? Am I capable of conducting my own affairs or not?

Door up L. *opens and* MARIA, *a lanky girl of* 12, *puts her head in.* EMILY *sees her.*

Emily (*dramatically*): John! (*Pointing.*) The child.

Rebuked, MR. PORTER *subsides into desperate silence.*

Maria: Papa, may I play "The Turkish Patrol" now?

Mr. Porter: Certainly not.

Maria (*coming to the top of table* C. *and whimpering*): But, Papa, Miss Magnet said——

Mr. Porter (*exploding*): Miss Magnet be——

Mrs. Porter (*rising hastily*): Retire, my child. Dear Papa is not very well.

Mr. Porter (*holding himself in once more*): Emily, this is between Clara and me—I will not endure any interference. I must decide about Henry, I must impress on Clara——

Mrs. Porter (*with rising hysteria*): Yes, indeed, I am to count for nothing—I, the mistress of his home and the mother of his children.

Mr. Porter (*more fiercely*): Will you allow me to speak?

Emily (*enjoying herself*): Pray compose yourself, John—this temper is most unbecoming. (*Moving to the fireplace.*)

Mr. Porter: Emily, I have been endeavouring to compose myself for the last half-hour. Pray let us all calm ourselves. Emily, I have decided

to overlook Henry's conduct—Sarah Speed is not such an ill choice.

Emily (*turning, horrified*) : After what you said last night !

Mrs. Porter (*triumphantly*) : Just so. Now the girl is praised up—put before my own daughters, yes, indeed, Emily, your brother taunted me with that. (*As* MR. PORTER *makes an effort to break in.*) I *will* speak ! You have abused me, John, accused me of unnatural conduct, told me my girls were a discredit to me, blasphemed the Book—— (*Tapping it.*)

Mr. Porter (*breaking in*) : Lies—lies !

Mrs. Porter : You hear, Emily, you hear !

Emily : I certainly do. (*To her brother.*) Clara had every right to reprove Henry and say what she thought of the Speed miss—entangling the poor boy.

Mr. Porter : She did not ! She said she would not receive his addresses without *my* consent.

Emily : So *Henry* says.

Mr. Porter : So I suppose the boy's a liar, too !

Mrs. Porter : *You* said he was last night when he tried to say his breath smelt of camomile tea !

Mr. Porter (*waving his hands*) : This is paltry, positively paltry. (*Swelling with indignation as he returns to* C.) I will not be dictated to, I have been too complacent, too tender, too sensitive, with the result that I am not able to open my mouth in my own house.

Emily: Fiddlesticks. I know what Clara has had to put up with.

Mrs. Porter (*clinging to her*): Dear Emily——

Mr. Porter (*disgusted*): Very affectionate, Mrs. Porter, very affectionate! I didn't hear so much of dear Emily when you missed the cherry brandy!

Emily (*pushing off* MRS. PORTER): Cherry brandy?

Mrs. Porter (*weeping*): Who is being paltry now, Mr. Porter? I never accused Emily.

Emily: I should hope not, indeed! Cherry brandy! So that was why you were measuring it off with a bit of string every night.

Mr. Porter: Precisely. Her nose was as keen for cherry brandy as mine for camomile tea.

Mrs. Porter: John!

Mr. Porter: You told me you smelt it in her bedroom, and that the *maids* were all above suspicion!

Emily (*outraged*): I can believe it—I've long known you've spied on me.

Mrs. Porter (*responding with temper*): Well, miss, you *have* got duplicate keys. Not many women would allow that.

Emily: Why have I got duplicate keys, Mrs. Porter? Because you are such an inefficient housekeeper—for twenty-five years I've stood in the background, counteracting your incompetence and extravagance.

Mrs. Porter: For twenty-five years I've endured

your interference, rudeness and uselessness, Miss Porter! (*Dabbing her eyes.*) I've shared my home with you, knowing you would never have one of your own—and *this* is my reward.

Emily: You've put on me all the work you didn't want to do yourself—stop crying, do; you're as strong as a horse, for all you spend half your time snoring on the sofy!

Mrs. Porter (*dramatically*): Mr. Porter, will you stand there and let your sister insult me?

Mr. Porter (*who has been watching the two women with sardonic enjoyment*): I think you are quite able to take care of yourself, Mrs. Porter. Emily has always made *me* very comfortable.

Emily (*turning on him*): Yes, that's what's the matter with you, I've spoilt you. I ought to have left you to Clara—that would have prevented you being so swelled up with vainglory.

Mr. Porter (*majestically*): Do you forget you share my home?

Emily (*grimly*): Well, I suppose my two hundred a year has helped, hasn't it?

Mrs. Porter (*shocked*): How disgusting!

Mr. Porter: What *are* we all saying to each other?

Emily (*with relish*): I don't quite know, but I'm sure it's something I've wanted to say for *years*.

MARIA *puts her head in door* L.

Maria (*on a whining note*) : Please, Papa, may I continue with "The Turkish Patrol"?

Mr. Porter (*roaring*) : No! You may not!

Mrs. Porter (*with a shudder*) : Brute!

MARIA PORTER *enters door* L. *and slams it behind her. Comes down stage* C. *and bursts into tears, knuckling her eyes. The three adults give suppressed exclamations of intense irritation.*

Maria (*howling*) : If I don't learn the piece I can't go to Miss Magnet's party, and if I don't go to the party I can't wear my new tarleton with the pretty cherry sash!

Mr. Porter (*moving up to window and down again, stifling his fury*) : *Your* daughter, Mrs. Porter, vain, disobedient, uncontrolled!

Mrs. Porter (*with false sweetness*) : Dear Papa doesn't like your pretty piece, dear Maria; dear Papa (*viciously*) still doesn't feel quite well. (*Going up to* MARIA *and caressing her.*) My darling girl must be patient.

Mr. Porter (*with suppressed fury*) : Dear Papa himself wants all the patience there is in this house. Clara, leave the child. Maria, go to your room.

Maria (*sobbing on her mother's shoulder*) : If I go—go—to—to—my room—may I practise "The Turkish Patrol" on—a—comb?

Mr. Porter (*walking about furiously*) : No! No! No!

Emily: You spoil the child, Clara—she is far too young for Miss Magnet's party—(*howls from* MARIA) and looks hideous in the tartleton—(*louder howls from* MARIA. EMILY *glares at her with intense dislike*)—with that complexion—*book muslin*—with those elbows—*sleeves.*

Mrs. Porter (*hysterically*): Since when have you been an authority on dress, Miss Porter? Is an old maid to dictate to *me* how I shall dress my daughters?

MARIA, *interested in this, stops howling to listen.*

Maria (*moving down between them*): Is Aunt Emily an old maid, dear Mamma?

Mrs. Porter (*turning on her*): You naughty, rude girl, how dare you interrupt?

Mr. Porter (*viciously*): Clara! Before the child!

MRS. PORTER *pulls herself together; a forced calm descends on them.* MARIA *sticks her finger in her mouth and looks round from one grim face to another.*

Maria: If I can't play "The Turkish Patrol," may I say my little poem?

Mr. Porter (*desperately flinging himself into the chair* R. *of table*): Certainly, my dear, certainly. Pray let us hear your little poem.

MARIA *puts her arms by her side and begins to gabble rapidly but distinctly.*

Maria: The tiny ant works all the day,
The bee works all the night—
And if I'd be as good as they,
I must be different—quite.

I must not yawn or laze or stare
As naughty children do.
Refuse to brush and comb my hair,
And say what is not true.

Mr. Porter (*interrupting*): Who wrote that?

Mrs. Porter (*scornfully*): I should have thought you would have known John Milton when you heard him.

Maria: Miss Magnet didn't give us John Milton. After all, dear Mamma, she wrote that herself—she said we could work it in cross stitch, too.

Mr. Porter (*exasperated*): It's nonsense—about the bee, anyhow. Where did the woman get her natural history from? Bees don't work all night.

Mrs. Porter: Of course they do—I've seen them.

Emily (*scornfully*): You haven't. You've never left the house after nine for years.

Mr. Porter (*grimly, ignoring the women*): Bees do *not* work all night.

Mrs. Porter (*weeping*): Then they ought to. It might make honey cheaper.

Emily (*spitefully*): If you were more careful with your accounts you wouldn't have to worry so over the cost of wholesome food.

Maria (*piping up*): May I say the rest of my poem?

Mrs. Porter (*sensing opposition*): Decorum, John, decorum—before the child! (*She puts handkerchief to her eyes and sinks into arm-chair above the fireplace* L.)

Mr. Porter (*calm, but fierce*): Proceed with your poem, Maria.

Maria (*gabbling*):

I'm very proud to think I am
A little English child.
I might have been a foreigner,
Or else a heathen wild.

But God was very good to me,
I thank His gracious Plan
Which set me in my loving Home
And made Papa—a Christian gentleman.

Mr. Porter (*mollified, smoothing his whiskers*): Very well, my dear, very well. I dare say Miss Magnet has observed the habits of bees more closely than I have.

Emily (*sitting in the arm-chair below the fireplace,*

sotto voce) : More closely than she has observed you, at least.

Mrs. Porter : Now run away, Maria.

Maria : There is a great deal of the poem, dear Mamma—(*exclamations of horror from all*)—but I don't know any more.

Emily : Then run away and learn it, you lazy girl !

Maria : Yes, dear Aunt Emily. (*Running to door up* L., *opening it and then pausing and looking back.*) When I've finished learning my little poem may I practise " The Turkish Patrol " ?

Mrs. Porter (*loudly*) : Yes.

MARIA *exits door* L.

Mr. Porter (*angrily*) : Why is the child not at Miss Magnet's ?

Mrs. Porter : Saturday is a holiday. You seem to forget everything.

Mr. Porter (*to both of them*) : You are sufficient to make a man forget everything, but I won't be provoked, I am determined not to be provoked —come here.

EMILY *and* MRS. PORTER *rise and approach the table, where he stands glaring.*

The trouble with females is that one must treat them as human beings—if they could be chained up, or locked up, or turned out—like—like—cats

I'm sure we should get on very well. But this attempt to use reason with creatures who haven't got any——

Emily (*acidly*) : I suppose you are founding your opinion of women on Clara ?

Mr. Porter : On every female I have ever met.

Mrs. Porter (*hysterical*) : Kicked out ! Kicked out ! Like—like—a cat !

Mr. Porter : I did *not* say *kicked*.

Mrs. Porter (*ignoring him*) : Kicked ! Such an indelicate expression !

Mr. Porter : As far as that goes you contrived to kick out Henry.

Mrs. Porter : John ! Kicked ! How can a gentlewoman kick ?

Emily (*looking at her skirts*) : I've often wondered. But what a marvellous feeling it must be —a good kick ! Ah ! La !

She lifts her skirt and, careering round, gives a good kick at the chair L. *by fire*

Mr. Porter (*really shocked*) : Emily ! Emily !

Mrs. Porter (*in hysterics*) : She has gone mad ! Oh dear ! Oh dear ! She has gone mad ! Mad !

Emily : Not at all. I've wanted to do it for years. I loathe that saddlebag suite—you brute ! (*Kicking the chair again.*)

Mrs. Porter (*hysterically*) : Your wedding gift to us, Emily !

Emily: When I gave it to you I didn't know I was going to live with you!

Mrs. Porter (*acidly*): No, you hadn't resigned all hope of making poor James Hopkins propose!

Mr. Porter (*shouting above the tumult*): Will you be silent! I want to talk of Henry, of Henry, do you hear? (*Thumping table.*) Henry!

MRS. PORTER, *who is sitting in the chair* L. *of table, screams in hysterics, and* EMILY *comes* L. *of her to table.*

Emily (*severely*): I wonder you're not ashamed to talk of Henry. You've driven him out of his home and broken his heart between you—I shouldn't wonder if he isn't at the bottom of Balls Pond by now.

Mrs. Porter (*faintly*): My salts! My salts! My heart—my palpitations. Oh, why didn't I die long ago!

Emily: Because you took such good care to keep yourself alive. I'll not fetch your salts—there is nothing the matter with you but temper. (*Turning back to the fireplace.*)

Mr. Porter (*still shocked*): Emily! I've never heard you talk like this before!

Emily (*grimly*): There's a sense of independence in the air. The spring, I suppose. Don't you feel it, John?

Mr. Porter (*fiercely*): How dare you accuse me of feeling the spring? I tell you I want a clear

understanding about Henry. I intend to give my consent to his marriage with Sarah Speed.

Emily: Indeed. Well, when *she* comes in *I* go out.

Mr. Porter (*sarcastically*): Partly why I shall welcome her, Miss Porter. What have you against the girl?

Emily (*folding her arms*): She is a—— (*Pause.*)

Mr. Porter: Emily!

Emily (*defiantly*): A puss. Positively—a puss.

Enter, door down R., MISS MATILDA PORTER, *a rather plain young woman of 22, in walking attire, with a large reticule.*

Matilda (*slightly mincing*): Dear Mamma, Miss Bertha positively cannot match the Berlin wool, neither the cerise, the magenta, nor the salmon pink.

Mr. Porter (*sullenly*): There are a good many things in this house unmatchable, Matilda. (*Moving up to the window.*)

MATILDA, *with a swimming motion, reaches table, opens reticule and pours out samples of bright-coloured wools, then, glancing round, sees the stony attitude of* EMILY *and* MR. PORTER *and the collapse of* MRS. PORTER.

Matilda: Dearest Mamma! Dearest Papa! Dearest Aunt Emily!

Mrs. Porter (*faintly*): One of my attacks, dear child. (MATILDA, *gliding to her mother and caressing her.*) Dear Papa has been horrid.

Matilda (*turning reproachfully to her father*): Papa!

Emily (*rapidly*): Fiddlesticks! Everyone has been horrid. You'll be horrid yourself in a minute. Your mother says I'm a thief, your father says she's driven Henry to suicide, they both say I've lived on their charity, I say he's a bully and she's a fool—and Henry is to marry the Speed—puss.

Mr. Porter (*crossing down* R.C., *roaring*): Lies! Lies!

MATILDA *collapses on her mother and joins her in hysterics.*

What have I done to be so tormented?

Emily: Married Clara.

Mrs. Porter (*with genuine surprise*): And we were all so loving!

Emily: Nonsense. We've been bickering for a quarter of a century.

Mrs. Porter: But this is the first time we have ceased to be civil.

Emily: Isn't it a relief?

Mr. Porter: *Not* before Matilda, please.

Emily: It will do Matilda good. Of course, she knows all about it. She heard all you said last night.

Matilda (*masking curiosity, recovering from her*

hysterics) : Yes, please let me stay. I want to be a comfort to you and dear Mamma, and a loyal sister to poor, misguided Henry—"Little deeds of kindness, little words of love." (*Sobbing.*)

Emily (*turning away*) : Rubbish.

Matilda : But *you* taught it me. Oh, dear, what has happened to everyone? (*Looking round at them all.*)

Mr. Porter (*pompously*) : I fear it is a crisis, my dear Matilda, a crisis—one word has followed another——

Mrs. Porter (*violently interrupting*) : One word followed another!

MR. PORTER *tries to speak, but by sheer volubility she silences him.*

No, I'll not be silent! (*Majestically rising.*) Matilda, your aunt has admitted to secret drinking, she has been smashing up the furniture—your father says I have driven Henry to suicide, and, ought to be kicked. (MATILDA *screams.*) Yes, *kicked* out of the house. He has been blasphemous (*banging the Bible,*) used foul language about Miss Magnet——

Matilda (*cutting in*) : I met Miss Magnet. She said I was to be sure to see Maria practised "The Turkish Patrol."

Mr. Porter / *Mrs. Porter* (*together*) : "The Turkish Patrol" won't be played any more in this house, Miss Porter.

Matilda: Oh, dear, something dreadful must have happened!

Emily (grimly): I always knew it was an unhappy marriage, but I never thought I'd live to see them admit it.

This acts as a cold douche on the others; they all stare at EMILY, *who seems to dominate them all. They become thoughtful;* MATILDA, *glancing away from her aunt, surveys her parents with a sharp curiosity that makes her forget her hysterics and affectations. A slight pause.*

Mr. Porter (facing a new thought): An unhappy marriage. Good heavens! Well, I suppose so.

Mrs. Porter: We never agreed about anything. Not from the very first. It was all pretence.

Mr. Porter: I don't know that I ever undertook to do more than pretend. After all, what more *can* a man undertake?

Mrs. Porter: Or a woman, either. How hard you were when little Annie died. (*Sobbing.*)

Emily: If little Annie had lived you would have found her just as trying as you do Matilda.

Mr. Porter (with curiosity to Matilda): Are *you* happy, Mattie?

Matilda (sharply): Happy?

Mr. Porter: I'm serious.

Mrs. Porter: Why shouldn't she be happy?

Mr. Porter (seriously): That's what I want to

know. Family life is not easy—you suddenly find you've been doing a difficult thing for twenty-five years. Here we are, accusing each other. What about? There's something in the air. (*Thoughtfully.*) It must be you women. I don't get this sort of thing at the office; everything goes smoothly there, year after year.

Matilda (*shrilly*): That is it, Papa: you have *got* the office. We're rather shut up.

Mr. Porter (*puzzled*): Shut up? This is your *home.*

Matilda: Home isn't enough.

Mr. Porter: Not enough? For a good woman?

Emily: Supposing we weren't any of us good women?

Mrs. Porter (*sharply*): Speak for yourself, Emily.

Matilda (*defiantly*): Papa asked if I was happy. Good? I don't know. I would like to go out more. Why *need* we live in Islington?

Mr. Porter (*amazed*): Don't you like Islington, Matilda? You were born here.

Matilda: Perhaps that's why No, I don't like it.

Mr. Porter: What would you like?

Matilda (*more defiantly*): To travel. Rose Watson went to Switzerland.

Mrs. Porter: They are dreadful people. Travel!

Matilda (*with remorse*): Oh, what dreadful things I'm saying! Papa, you should not have asked me if I was happy!

Mr. Porter (*slowly*) : I suppose it is a dangerous question. Queer how I came to ask it. (*Looking round at the three women.*) How was I to know you were not happy ? You've always behaved yourselves—till to-day. And so have I.

Mrs. Porter (*spitefully*) : I dare say. But there are *hours* when we don't see you. *We* are always here, watching each other.

Mr. Porter : I suppose you'll tell me next that you aren't fond of one another ?

Emily : No one could be fond of Clara. I've been sorry for her—and amused.

Mrs. Porter (*bridling*) : I hope there is some credit due to me for enduring Emily all these years.

Matilda : I believe this is the first chance I have had of being taken seriously, or speaking seriously. It's a funny feeling.

Mr. Porter (*with dreadful curiosity*) : Aren't you fond of your mother and aunt ?

Matilda (*slowly*) : Of course, I must be. But I would like to get away from them.

Mr. Porter : And this is a Christian home !

Emily : That is what is the matter with it—no one could keep up appearances as well as we have, and for so long, without suffering for it.

Matilda (*quickly*) : Suffering ! Yes, one does.

Mrs. Porter : Ungrateful girl, surrounded with every comfort. *I've* suffered—my heart, my nerves, the anxieties of bringing up you children,

your father's tempers. And I don't like Islington, either !

Softly but firmly there breaks in the sound of "The Turkish Patrol."

Mr. Porter (*starting at the sound*) : Why *need* Maria learn "The Turkish Patrol" ?

Emily : For the same reason that we live in Islington, I suppose.

Matilda : I hate my drawing lessons. Must I have them ? I would like to ask Mr. Bliss to tea —may I ?

Emily : I would like to take my money, go away and spend it on myself. I would like to keep a parrot, and to *not* go to Margate every year. Yes, I should like everything to be quite different.

Mr. Porter (*pondering*) : Why can't it be ?

Mrs. Porter : If I once began saying what *I* would like ! Why, I daren't even begin to think about it.

Mr. Porter (*still pondering*) : You never began to think about anything, did you, Clara ? Not really to *think*. I don't believe I have, either—it's dangerous. Look where we've got to now. (*To* EMILY.) Quite different, eh ? But we are all comfortable.

Emily : Yes. One's body is, but one's mind always seems to be sitting on hard chairs.

Matilda : And having nasty food, and never

resting properly—yes, it's all inside one. May I have Mr. Bliss to tea?

Emily: If you married Mr. Bliss, you'd have another home like this, exactly.

Matilda (*bitterly*): Don't! Don't! (*Sitting down at the table and turning over the wools mechanically.*)

Mr. Porter (*heavily*): I don't see what good all this is doing. I've allowed you women too much licence. It ought not to be possible for you to talk like this. You've made me forget all I was going to say about Henry. After all, Henry is more important than any of you.

Mrs. Porter: Henry and I——

Mr. Porter: I won't hear a word from you about Henry. You turned him out of the house; he may have run away or drowned himself, for all I know. A fine mother, Mrs. Porter! (*To* MATILDA.) As for you, miss, you may not have that Bliss fellow to tea; he is only a clerk.

Mrs. Porter: Wherever did you meet him? I never heard you mention him before. For shame, miss.

Matilda (*dully*): I met him at the Church sale of work——

Emily (*interrupting*): He is very plain. Why did you want to ask him here?

Matilda: Because he is the only man who ever wanted to come.

Mrs. Porter (*seriously frightened*): We can't

have these things said! We can't! John, I shall return to mother.

Matilda: You quarrelled with Grannie last time we visited her.

Mrs. Porter: Be silent, miss! John, do you hear? I've been insulted, outraged, treated atrociously by you and your children. I am leaving the house. (*Putting her handkerchief to her eyes.*) Oh, my heart! I feel faint. My head!

They all look at her without offering assistance as she collapses on chair L. *of the table.*

Emily: She'll never go—or if she did she'd come back; Gran. is cleverer than we are.

Matilda: Henry is the lucky one. He has got free.

Emily: He'll marry that Speed—puss.

Matilda: I hate her!

Mr. Porter: Why, Mattie, why?

Matilda (*fiercely*): She is so pretty.

Mr. Porter: Emily, stop that child playing.

Emily (*going to door* L., *opening it and calling out*): Stop that horrid noise, miss, or I'll smack you till you can't sit on the piano-stool!

The music ceases suddenly. EMILY *shuts the door.*

Mrs. Porter (*faintly*): Oh, what vulgarity! How degrading! And Matilda talking of pretti-

ness and young men—you bold, brazen girl! And Sarah Speed *isn't* pretty, either!

Mr. Porter: I quite understand poor Mattie—you ought to have seen to it she had better chances—did her hair differently.

Mrs. Porter (rising wildly): Let me get away—help me, someone, let me get out—I'm stifling. John—oh, John! The man wants me to deck out my Matilda like a daughter of Babylon! Oh! Oh! After all these years of patience! We indeed wander in a vale of tears!

The two women give some perfunctory attention to MRS. PORTER, *who collapses in her chair.*

Mr. Porter (losing his temper with a roar): I'll be damned, blasted, roasted if I'll wander in the vale of *your* tears any more!

He sweeps wax flowers and wool mat off the table with a gesture of abandoned fury. MRS. PORTER'S *hysterics rise louder, she beats her heels on the floor.* MARIA *sticks her head out of door* L. *and gapes, unnoticed by any.*

(*Roaring.*) I'll stand no more of it—d'ye hear, the pack of you? You're hampered, overfed, lazy, useless, ill-tempered, jealous! Henry was worth the lot of you! And then a dozen more!

The women make some incoherent efforts to speak, but they are cowed.

A man toils to make money to spend on—you! (*Pointing at them.*)

MARIA, *unseen in the background, begins to giggle. Enter, door* R., HENRY, *a spruce, neat young man, neither as foolish as his mother nor as formidable as his father. Bright and slightly self-assured, his appearance works a miracle with the group by the table.* MRS. PORTER *instantly drops her hysterics, straightens her cap, and, smiling,* EMILY *makes a grab for the wax fruit.*

Emily (*glibly*): An accident! How vexatious! Your dear Papa, Henry, tripped over the table, and I fear the lovely fruit is broken!

Matilda (*her smooth manner returned*): Never mind, dear Aunt Emily, I believe I shall be able to mend it quite neatly!

MR. PORTER *darts a look of amazement at this feminine duplicity, then decides to imitate it.*

Mr. Porter (*with breathless composure*): Your mother was threatened with one of her attacks—hastening to her assistance I tripped.

Henry (*advancing*): Dear Mother—you have recovered, I trust?

Embracing his mother, who is now perfectly controlled and even smiling. MR. PORTER *can hardly restrain his amazement.*

Mrs. Porter (*coyly*) : I am perfectly recovered, dear Henry ; but you have been a long time !

MARIA *enters from door* L. EMILY *and* MATILDA *are piecing together the wax fruits.*

Henry (*brightly*) : I have brought Sarah. I had some difficulty to persuade her ; but she is waiting in the hall for your permission to come in.

All save MRS. PORTER *look at him, surprised.* MATILDA *drops the wax fruit she holds.*

Mr. Porter : Sarah ! Miss Speed here !

Henry (*turning to him*) : Oh, dear Papa, Mother said I could. She said she was sure you would soften. She was so *very* kind, dear Mamma.

Mr. Porter : Kind ? I thought——

Emily : Hush ! John !

Mr. Porter (*faintly*) : Fetch Miss Speed, Henry.

Henry : Oh, thank you, sir.

HENRY, *shaking his hand violently, exits by the door* R.

Mr. Porter (*turning instantly to his wife*) : Clara ! You were—kind ? You didn't drive Henry away ?

Mrs. Porter : Of course not. But you never allowed me to say so,—you kept threatening and bullying.

Mr. Porter (*to* EMILY *in despair*) : If she'd only *told* me. The woman is a fool.

Emily: But you knew that. Don't let Henry see anything wrong.

Mr. Porter: All over nothing! I don't know how I can pull myself together.

Matilda: For Henry's sake——

Enter HENRY, *door* R., *with* MISS SPEED, *very pretty and demure. The family greet her with forced but emphatic smiles; their affectations, now safely resumed again, carry them over an awkward moment.* MISS SPEED *glides from one to another with affectionate greetings.*

Miss Speed (*crossing to* MRS. PORTER): Oh, Mrs. Porter, I am overwhelmed—when dear Henry said you would receive me—— (*Turning to* MR. PORTER.) And you, dear sir. I know I am unworthy of your regard—a disappointing match for you—but I will be a good, obedient wife to Henry.

Mr. Porter: Of course, of course, my dear. I'm delighted, I'm sure. Mrs. Porter is delighted, everyone is delighted—in fact we were gathered here to welcome you.

Henry (*unctuously*): How good everyone is!

Matilda (*to* MISS SPEED): We are going to be *great* friends. I've always admired you so much!

Emily (*to* MISS SPEED, *who has crossed to her*): I always *hoped* you were going to say "yes" to Henry.

Miss Speed (*taking a hand of each*) : How *good* everyone is !

Mrs. Porter (*looking round*) : Ah, here is Maria. Come forward, child, and speak to your new sister.

MARIA *comes forward, gaping and staring.*

Miss Speed (*embracing* MARIA) : Oh, this is the little darling who plays so beautifully !

Mr. Porter (*patting* MARIA'S *head*) : Yes, quite a talent, quite a talent. She is learning "The Turkish Patrol," a most interesting piece. I always insist on really *good* music.

Maria : But, Papa, you said——

Mrs. Porter (*crossing to above table*) : Hush, dear. (*Holding up her hand reprovingly.*) Never speak till you are spoken to.

Henry : Mamma, I've promised Sarah you'll teach her some of your wonderful housekeeping.

Miss Speed : Pray do, Mrs. Porter, though I shall never be able to make Henry as comfortable as you do !

Mrs. Porter (*simpering*) : I do my best.

Mr. Porter (*pompously*) : You couldn't come to a better school, Miss Speed. I flatter myself this is a well-run home.

Henry : And, Papa, we've planned to take the little house next door, so that we won't have to leave Islington !

Matilda : Won't that be wonderful—not to leave Islington !

Miss Speed (*who has crossed back to* HENRY, *shyly*): And Papa and I have arranged to come to Margate, too, this summer.

Emily: That will be delightful. You'll love Margate.

Mrs. Porter (*fatuously*): I'm sure we're all going to be very, very happy.

Henry: And perhaps Aunt Emily could come and live with us—just to show Sarah the way I like things.

Mr. Porter: An excellent idea. Emily will enjoy making you comfortable, I'm sure.

MARIA *exits quietly and sneakingly by the door up* L.

Henry: Dear Mamma, we met that fellow Bliss coming along. He tried to make himself friendly, but I soon showed him his mistake.

Miss Speed: Such a common man!

Matilda: Odious. I am so glad you showed him he was being impertinent.

Emily: Matilda was only saying this morning he was becoming quite pestering.

Matilda: Dear Aunt Emily.

She puts her arm through that of EMILY. MR. PORTER *puts his with a loving gesture round his wife. They face* HENRY *and* MISS SPEED, *who stand* R.

Mr. Porter: All I can say, my dears, is that I hope you'll be as happy as we've been—these twenty-five years.

"The Turkish Patrol" is heard from the next room.

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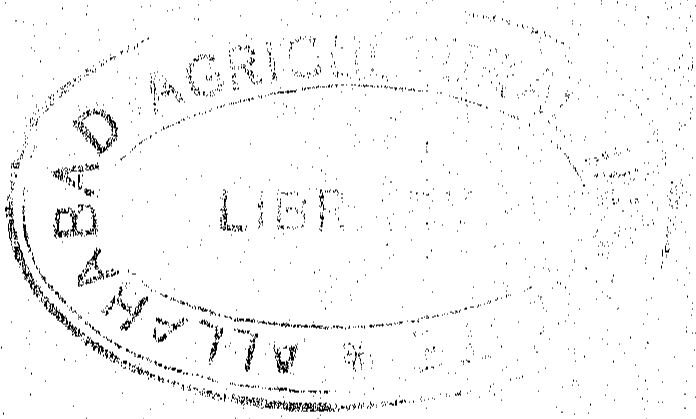
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WAYSIDE WAR

MARGARET NAPIER



CHARACTERS

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

THE OSTLER.

SUSAN.

THE COLONEL.

MARTIN, *the Sergeant.*

ALICIA PEMBERTON.

SCENE: *An Inn near Bridgewater*

TIME: 1685.

WAYSIDE WAR

SCENE: *The guest-room of an inn between Bridgewater and Western Zoyland, on a cold, rainy day during the summer of* 1685, *just before the battle of Sedgemoor. On the left is the fireplace, a big fire blazing, with a chair beside it, and rather to the right a square oak table, with a chair behind and to the left of it. Through the window at the back, and the door in the right corner, the yard is partly visible; the window has a wide window-seat.*

The Ostler, an inscrutable young man, is sitting at the table in his shirt-sleeves, gloomily biting his nails; a glass of beer is at his elbow.

Suddenly he hears the sound of horses' hoofs and raises his head, but makes no other movement. The COLONEL *is heard to dismount with a jingle of reins.*

The Colonel's Voice (deep and rough): Hold him a moment, will you. (*Shouting.*) Ostler! Ostler!

The Ostler: Oh, stop that racket.

The Voice: Here! Ostler! Isn't there anyone about?

Susan's Voice (within): Come along, Frank, come along. Where's Frank? Hasn't the fellow

got any ears? . . . (SUSAN, *the innkeeper's wife, enters busily.*) Oh, there you are! And what are you thinking of, eh? Can't you hear the gentleman calling?

The Ostler: Yes.

Susan: Well, get up, then, get up, and don't keep him waiting. Such goings on, upon my soul! (*She goes to the window.*) Soldiers they are, a fair batch of them. . . . Ah, if I was a bit younger! Well, looks don't keep for ever, and there'd be a deal of trouble and anxiety in being tied to an army man. Well, well . . . but, lord, what an 'andsome officer. . . .

Colonel's Voice: Here! Where the devil is the ostler?

Susan: That's him, busting his lungs because you don't go when he call, you lazy fool, you. Make haste now. What do I pay you for, eh? To sit and drink at table, like a proper gentleman?

Ostler (*slowly*): Soldiers, are they? King's men or no? I don't go out in this weather to stable a Monmouth man's horses, not for any money.

Susan: Well, how can *I* tell which they be?

Ostler (*rising*): Oh, red uniforms, red uniforms.

Susan: Then King's men they are, but—(*stopping him on the way to the door*) mark this while you're about it. If I pay you sixpence a day to ostle the horses, ostle them you will, ice, snow or rain—coming, sir!—and, good and loyal citizen

though I be, I tell you this : don't you dare trouble to know whether their uniforms be red or tawny, so long as they have the money to pay for it, or one day you'll find yourself on the road again as you were before. And now, get along, do, and don't stand listening like a fool to what I tell you. (*The outer door is opened loudly.*) He's coming, sir, he's coming !

Before the OSTLER *can go out, the* COLONEL *enters wrathfully. He is a very straight-backed military man, good-looking and aggressive. He speaks abruptly, raising his voice every now and then with unnecessary vigour.*

Colonel : Here ! Isn't there a soul alive in this heaven-forsaken hole ?

Susan : I was just telling the ostler, sir——

Ostler : Coming, sir. (*Gloomily, as he reaches the door.*) Going, sir.

Colonel : Well, see that the horses are stabled and fed. I've no time to spare, and this weather's the devil.

Ostler : Yes, sir.

Exit OSTLER.

Colonel (*looking after him*) *:* Who is that fellow ?

Susan : That's Frank, sir, the ostler, sir.

Colonel : Was he ever in the army ?

Susan: I don't know, sir, I'm sure. I——

Colonel: I know his face—but never mind. (*As he pulls off his dripping gloves.*) Tcha! This rain!

He bangs down his riding-crop on the table.

Susan: And will you be staying the night, sir?

Colonel: Night? No, no, I'm only here an hour or two. Perhaps longer, but it's not likely.

Susan: You won't be starting again in this weather, surely?

Colonel (*impatiently*): Yes. Now look here, I want something hot to drink, and see that my men get it, too. That's all.

Susan: Punch, sir?

Colonel: Anything—only be quick.

Susan: Thank you, sir. That will be eightpence.

Colonel: Right. I'll pay you afterwards.

Susan: I'm sorry, I can't have that, sir. With this war going on I've lost too much money that way. "I'll pay you afterwards," they say, and then a bugle sounds, and, "Pardon me, ma'am," they say, "but duty before all things," and off they go, and like as not get killed the same day. Plenty of time, mark you, to put the drink inside, but not a moment to spare in which to pay for it; and, one way and another, I don't get what I ought. You soldiers are all alike, eh, sir? (*He*

looks at her coldly. Her smile fades.) That will be eightpence, please.

Colonel (*impatiently*): Very well, very well. Here you are. (*He pays her.*)

Susan: Thank you, sir.

Colonel: Anyone been here this morning?

Susan: None but the two what stayed the night, sir.

Colonel (*without much interest*): Who was that?

Susan: Ah, two beautiful young men they were, sir.

Colonel: Beauty, be d——d! Monmouth or the King?

Susan: I'm sure I don't know, sir. (*The* COLONEL, *with an impatient exclamation, brings out his map and pencil, and begins to study it at the table.*) If you was thinking of following them, sir, they started off early this morning; scarcely light it was, and, as I said to them, "You won't get to Bridgewater," I says, "not in this rain you won't," and they says to me, with a few good oaths—not that I care for that, bein' used to soldiers, one way and another—"Never mind, ma'am," they says, "if we can't get to Bridgewater to-day we'll have to come back to you, so it's a case of the devil and the deep sea," they says, meaning me for the deep sea, so they says—just a manner of speaking, they says—and meaning both the devil and the deep sea as pleasant

sort of things, in no ways offensive to anyone. Yes, sir, and they was telling me——

Colonel (*who has been entirely preoccupied with his map, and now looks up vaguely for some one to address.*) Er—you—woman, look out of the window and tell the Sergeant to come here.

Susan (*piqued*) : Very well, sir. (*Grumbling, as she goes to the window.*) Never do you get a gentleman with any manners these days. 'Tis the war upsets them—such goings on and bangings about. (*She opens the window.*) Hi ! Sergeant ! Which of you is the Sergeant ?

A Voice : Me, ma'am.

Susan (*her voice softening*) : Step inside, Sergeant, do. The young man in here wants to have a chat with you. (*The* COLONEL *looks up angrily.* SUSAN *returns from the window.*) I always said them red uniforms were the makings of a man. Now, that reminds me. Them two young men you inquired after, what stayed the night, they left a message for you.

Colonel (*puzzled*) : *What* ?

Susan : Leastways, if someone comes and inquires after us, they says, you give him this, and don't forget. No doubt you're the man, sir.

Colonel (*interested*) : Oh-h, I see. . . . Yes, yes, no doubt I am. I'll have the message (*in a low voice*) anyhow.

Susan (*feeling about her dress*) : Where is it, now ? You don't say I mislaid it. . . . No, I

mind me, 'tis on the kitchen dresser. I'll fetch it, sir.

Colonel: Good.

She exits, meeting the SERGEANT *in the doorway.*

Susan: In here, Sergeant, please.

MARTIN *enters, a healthy and good-tempered young man. He comes to the table and salutes.*

Martin: Sir?

Colonel: Do the men know why we're here?

Martin: No, sir.

Colonel: Do *you* know?

Martin: Well—not for sure, sir.

Colonel: What do you mean? You guess, do you?

Martin: I heard about the messages getting through, of course, sir.

Colonel: Yes, that's it. Four in a week. There must be some fellow who spies on our camp, and carries his messages along this road to Monmouth at Bridgewater. Our men were warned, too, and we had a squad here every day of the week; but he slipped past, all the same. (*Suddenly.*) Fools! . . . However, it's our chance now.

Martin: That's good, sir.

Colonel: It may be—that remains to be seen.

You saw the speed we came at from Western Zoyland this morning. Well, the reason was this: a copy of the plans for our move north to Sutton Mallet, and attack on Bridgewater, has disappeared. . . . Do you hear?

Martin: Yes, sir.

Colonel: Well, then.

Martin: I see, sir. I should have thought, sir, he would have been at Bridgewater by now.

Colonel: You're wrong—he isn't. The fellow here tells me that no one came this way since early this morning; the same with the other man posted in the field. (*Frowning.*) Did we pass anyone on the road?

Martin: No, sir—except a girl riding.

Colonel: Right. Then the man is still behind us, and we have a chance to stop him. And stop him we will, Martin, whatever the cost. Do you understand?

Martin: Yes, sir. But supposing the fellow don't come past this way?

Colonel: I shall not waste my time supposing anything so ridiculous. It's the only road from Western Zoyland to Bridgewater. Where else should he go?

Martin: Mightn't he go across country, sir?

Colonel: Look out of the window, and don't be an idiot. Could a man go half a mile through that bog in safety. (*Looking at the map.*) It's marsh, marsh, everywhere. He's got to keep to

the road, and he's got to come past here. No, we're safe that way. It's our brains that have got to do the work. When he got past before, it was by some confounded trick or another, not by plain dealing, as a King's man would. Now, look here. (*He pulls the map towards him.*) This is Western Zoyland, and this is our main army; over here is Bridgewater and Chilton Trinity, and Monmouth has his—(*sarcastically*)—his *army* just between. Our plan is to move half our men up to Sutton Mallet to advance on them from the north, and send Colonel Cartwright with a battalion to attack them from the Chilton Trinity side and take off their attention from the main advance. Now, if we let the papers get through to the enemy, all this plan will be wiped out; as you see, it is a surprise tactic, and success depends on secrecy.

Martin: Yes, sir.

Colonel (*with great enthusiasm, seeing in his mind's eye the vision of a heroic self*): But those papers will not get through. *I* am here. . . . (*He rolls up the map vigorously.*) And, if they do, I shall hang you and all your men. Right?

Martin: Right, sir.

Colonel: What I intend to do is quite simple. You will—— (*A knock on the door.*) Oh, what do you want? Come in.

The OSTLER *enters.*

Ostler: I was told to give you this, sir.

He hands him a piece of paper.

Colonel: Who from?

Ostler: Susan, sir.

Colonel: Oh, yes, yes—the woman who talks. That message, of course. (*He reads it with some excitement.*) Er—er—Martin, we're in luck.

Martin: Sir?

Colonel: This was left here this morning, by a couple of rebels who stayed the night, to be inquired for by the fellow with the plans, on the chance, I suppose, of his having secured them and made his way as far as this. Gad, they take risks, don't they? Listen! "If you have got them, ride two or three hundred yards down the road, and turn up the lane to the left; one of my men will be waiting to carry on. I wish you luck." (*Grimly, to himself.*) Luck! (*Suddenly, to the* OSTLER.) What are you waiting for, eh?

Ostler (*pulling himself together*): Your horses are stabled, sir.

Colonel: Good.

Ostler (*holding out his hand*): And fed.

Colonel: Good.

The OSTLER *glances with a sigh at* MARTIN.

Martin (*in a whisper*): No luck, old son.

The OSTLER *shrugs his shoulders and departs.*

Colonel: These infernal money-grubbers. (*Taking up the paper.*) You see, they even *expect* him here.

Martin: How did you get hold of that message, sir? That was a bad slip of the enemy.

Colonel (*shortly*): Yes. They gave it to a woman.

Martin (*understanding*): Oh-h.

Colonel: I asked her who had been here this morning. She told me, thought I was inquiring after them, and practically pushed it into my hand. But what can you expect? Women are fools.

Martin: That's right, sir. Sir, shall I send a couple o' men down the road and arrest the fellow who's waiting to carry on?

Colonel (*considering*): No . . . no, we won't do that. (*He walks to the fire and stands with his back to it.*) If you arrest the man now there may be a disturbance, and the messenger will get warned. Let him walk in here, and we'll have both him and the papers.

Martin: Shall I draw a cordon across the road?

Colonel: Yes, post your men across; and don't let any live thing under the sun—man, woman, or child—get past this inn without my permission. The day before yesterday Major Heywood let past a man who said he was on his

way to a dying grandmother; that lost us half a battalion. No risks like that, Martin. Well, post your men across, and waste no more time. (*With a nod.*) That's all.

Martin: Yes, sir.

MARTIN *moves to go out, but is prevented by* SUSAN *entering with hot drinks.*

Susan: Here you are, sir—good hot punch. They say there isn't a better brew for miles round.

Colonel: Good. Put it on the table.

Susan: And what about you, Sergeant? Ale, punch, cider——?

Martin: Oh, I'll come into the kitchen.

Alicia's Voice (*outside*): Ostler!

They all turn towards the window.

Susan: Frank! Where are you? There's a lady calling in the yard.

Exit SUSAN.

The COLONEL *goes to the window and looks out, then returns, relieved.*

Colonel: Only a girl, resting her horses. (*He nods again.*) Go on, then.

Martin: Yes, sir.

MARTIN *salutes and exits. The* COLONEL *takes his map and drink, and settles himself comfortably by the fire.*

Susan's Voice: This way, my lady. The horses shall be seen to, my lady. This way.

Woman's Voice: Oh, thank you, and will you see that my man has something to drink?

Susan's Voice: Yes, my lady, I will. This way.

ALICIA PEMBERTON *enters the room, talking over her shoulder. She is in her riding-habit, and is young, charming and self-possessed.*

Alicia: In here?

Susan (following her): That's right, my lady. (*She is about to show her to the fire, but hesitates, on observing the* COLONEL.) Will you sit by the table, then?

Alicia: Thank you.

Susan: And now what can I get you, my lady? Some punch, ale——

Alicia: No, I don't think——

Susan: Then a cup of strong tea, eh? That will suit you better, no doubt.

Alicia: Oh, please, Susan; I think I will. But don't be long, will you. How much is that?

Susan: That's all right, my lady. You can pay me afterwards. I always like to trust my customers.

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Exit SUSAN.

Colonel (*involuntarily*): Well, I'm——

He meets ALICIA'S *eye and is silent. They look away again. There is a long pause, each secretly studying the other with interest. Once their eyes meet, and the* COLONEL *looks away angrily,* ALICIA *with a smile. Then* ALICIA *shivers, and glances at the fire, but the* COLONEL *makes no movement. She shivers again, then presently speaks.*

Alicia: Isn't it cold?
Colonel: Very.

Turns his back slightly, and studies the map.

Alicia (*later on*): I mean, for this time of year.
Colonel: Yes.
Alicia: I suppose it's the rain.
Colonel: It probably is.

A long pause.

Alicia: One does get so wet, travelling to-day.
Colonel: Yes.
Alicia: And cold, really. . . . (*There is no answer.*) Of course, the farther one travels, the colder one gets.

Colonel: Of course.

Alicia (*brightly*): I have just come twenty miles. (*A silence.*) How far have you come?

Colonel (*annoyed*): I don't know. Three or four.

Alicia: Oh, yes. (*Pause.*) It *is* cold, isn't it?

Colonel (*rising with dignity, but much annoyed*): Madam, I must ask you to take my seat by the fire.

Alicia: Oh, no, please. I wouldn't think of it.

Colonel: I insist, ma'am, absolutely. You are evidently colder than I am.

Alicia: Yes, but—— Oh, well, if you insist, of course. (*She comes over to the fire.*) It is really very thoughtful of you. I am so grateful.

Colonel (*stiffly*): Please don't mention it.

Alicia: But I am. It's wonderfully warm over here.

Colonel: I know it is.

A pause.

Alicia: I am getting so dry.

Colonel: Good.

Another pause.

Alicia (*suddenly*): Where are you going to?

Colonel (*startled*): I—er—madam, I am on active war service.

Alicia: Oh, I see. That means that you go round and round in one place, doesn't it?

Colonel (*coldly*) : It means that my destination is a secret from the public.

Alicia : Am I the public ?

Colonel : Naturally.

Alicia : It also means that you don't want to talk to me, do you ?

Colonel (*taken aback*) : I—I don't know—I don't know what you mean—I don't know who you are——

Alicia : No, of course you don't. How silly of me ! Well, my name is Alicia Pemberton. Have you heard of me ?

Colonel (*crossly*) : No.

Alicia : Oh. Oh, well. Quite a lot of people have, you know. But perhaps I am not looking my best after being out in this horrible weather. (*Looking round.*) I wish there was a looking-glass somewhere. Well, never mind. It's a pity you don't know where you're going, because I thought we might have travelled together. I am going to Bridgewater.

Colonel (*pleased*) : I am sorry. I should have enjoyed your company, ma'am.

Alicia : Thank you, Lieutenant.

Colonel (*indignantly*) : Madam, I am not a Lieutenant.

Alicia : Oh, I am so sorry—General.

Colonel (*furiously thumping the table*) : I am not a General !

Alicia (*sympathetically*) : But you soon will be,

won't you? (*He is angrily silent*). Or won't you?

Colonel: It all depends, ma'am.

Alicia (*interested*): What does it depend on?

Colonel: Oh, I don't know; one thing and another.

Alicia: Then what are you now? Do tell me what those little stripes mean?

Colonel: Well—I am a Colonel.

Alicia: A Colonel! How grand and delightful! But I always thought Colonels were old men.

Colonel (*pleased again*): Not always—in war time one is promoted earlier.

Alicia: I see; then there *are* some advantages in having a war. Do you enjoy fighting, Colonel?

Colonel: It is rather difficult to say, ma'am. It is my profession, of course, and I am—well—interested in it. Fighting is a science nowadays, and it requires a man with brains to be successful in war, not just a stone wall. A soldier must be a clever man.

Alicia: And yet he must be a brave man, too—even nowadays. Tell me—are you ever frightened?

Colonel: Ma'am, I am an officer and an English gentleman.

Alicia: Ah, yes. (*Later.*) Even in your first battle?

Colonel: What? Oh, my first battle. Well, I don't think I was afraid—I was too excited. I remember what a hash we made of it; we had

Colonel: Eh?

Susan: A message, now.

Alicia: It was a message to be inquired for.

Colonel (*leaping to his feet*): What the devil!

Alicia (*politely*): What did you say?

Colonel (*controlling himself with an effort*): Nothing. I beg your pardon. I—I was thinking of something else.

Susan: There was a message, my lady—but no, not for you.

Alicia: Are you sure?

The COLONEL *fixes* SUSAN *with his eye.*

Susan (*beginning to feel doubtful*) Well, maybe I—it was to be inquired for——

Colonel: If you are thinking of the message that you gave me this morning, that was for myself, not for this lady; otherwise I should have returned it.

Susan: Ah, well, my lady, then there was nothing for you.

Exit SUSAN.

Alicia (*puzzled*): Thank you. (*She sits, lost in thought; then, looking up, finds the* COLONEL *staring intently at her. Hastily.*) A message about some fresh horses.

Colonel (*grimly*) : Indeed.

Alicia : Yes.

She looks away absently, thinking; then shrugs her shoulders and begins to drink her tea.

Colonel (*to himself—staring at her*) : A woman! It's not possible.

Alicia : What's the matter, Colonel?

Colonel : It's not possible.

Alicia : What isn't possible?

Colonel (*raising his voice*) : But, by heaven, I won't be bluffed.

Alicia (*putting down her cup*) : Oh, no, you mustn't be. Can I help?

Colonel : I—well, the fact is, ma'am, this is very embarrassing for me.

Alicia : Really, Colonel. Are you going to propose to me after knowing me such a short time?

Colonel : I must ask you to take me more seriously.

Alicia : More seriously than that?

Colonel : I hope you will not take it as an offence if I—I put a few questions to you. My duty—my position—there are one or two things which I ought to——

Alicia : Of course. Anything you want to know.

Colonel (*suddenly assuming a martial air*) :

Colonel: Eh?

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Alicia : Of course. Anything you want to know.
Colonel (*suddenly assuming a martial air*) :

Well, then, the first thing I want to know is how the devil you came to know that woman so well?

Alicia: Who, Susan? (*Embarrassed for a moment.*) Well, I—— (*Laughing.*) Really, Colonel, you jump at me so, you make me feel quite frightened.

Colonel: That's not an answer.

Alicia: No. Well, I know her so well, because—— (*She pauses, looking down.*) Well, you see, she was a maid to my mother for some time, and then, when she married, she and her husband bought this inn, and settled down here.

Colonel: I see. How long ago was that?

Alicia (*glibly*): Three years.

Colonel: Three years, and nine children? Am I to believe they are all triplets?

Alicia: Did I say three, Colonel? I meant thirteen.

Colonel: Now, listen to me, ma'am. You have just told me that you know this woman so well because she was a maid to your mother before she took this inn. (*Impressively.*) Now I suggest another reason. You know her so well because, during the last week or two, you have been so often to and fro upon this road—eh? What about that?

Alicia: Well, that seems a very good reason, too. I dare say it may have been partly that.

Colonel (*excitedly*): What, you admit you often come this way? And why, may I ask, why?

Alicia: Why? Because I so often go to visit my uncle in Bridgewater—that's why.

Colonel: Don't be ridiculous; you haven't got an uncle in Bridgewater.

Alicia: Very well, Colonel, if you say so. What can *you* suggest?

Colonel: I suggest nothing; but I tell you to your face that you are a spy and a rebel——

Alicia (*rising*): Colonel!

Colonel: Yes, and that it is you, you yourself, who have carried the messages through from Western Zoyland to the Duke of Monmouth. That is why you know this road, and that is why you know this woman. (*Proudly.*) What do you say to that?

Alicia (*beginning to laugh*): Me! . . . Oh, I don't know. . . . It's such a delightful idea. . . . A spy! Me! . . . Really, Colonel, I wish you could see how funny it is——

Colonel: Do you deny it?

Alicia: But of course!

Colonel: Very well, then.

He goes to the door.

Alicia: You're not going already, are you?

Colonel (*opening the door and calling*): Susan! Here! What's your name——

Alicia: No——

Colonel: Susan!

Alicia (*gravely*): Colonel, I think you're behaving in an extraordinary way.

Colonel: I am doing my duty, ma'am.

Susan (*entering*): Well, well, now, what is it? Some more punch, sir?

Colonel: No. I want to put a few questions to you.

Susan: Well, make haste, please: I've got the children to see to.

Colonel: This is a very serious matter.

Alicia: He wants us to take him seriously, Susan. You must try hard.

Colonel (*drowning her*): Now, then, woman, I want to know, in the first place—what exactly you did before you bought this inn?

Susan (*delighted*): Oh, *well*, sir, if you want to know about *that*, sir, I can tell you all about *that*, sir. My father lived in Dorset, and I——

Colonel: Er—in as few words as possible. Were you ever maid to this lady's mother?

Susan: No, sir, most certainly—I—— (*She catches sight of* ALICIA, *wildly gesticulating.*) I—(*vaguely*)—well, yes, sir, I was.

Colonel: You were?

Susan (*puzzled but dogged*): Yes, sir, I was.

Colonel: Oh, and now—how long have you had this inn?

Susan: A good twenty years, sir. (ALICIA, *in agitation, holds up her fingers.* SUSAN, *trying*

to understand, adds): No, no; now, one moment——

Colonel (*turning round sharply*): What are you doing, ma'am?

Alicia: Killing a fly, Colonel.

Colonel: I do not see the fly.

Alicia: Of course not—I have killed it.

Colonel: Very well, you can go, Susan. That's all.

Susan: And if at any time you should wish to know about my past life, sir——

Colonel: No, no, no—that's all. You can go.

Susan: Very well, sir.

Exit SUSAN.

Colonel (*turning to* ALICIA): Madam, you have been lying to me.

Alicia: Have you never lied yourself, General—I mean, Colonel?

Colonel: That is beside the point, and it is not the kind of question that you ask an officer and a gentleman. Do you still deny that you are the messenger?

Alicia: Don't be silly; of course I do.

Colonel: You are wasting time, then. I know all about it. (*He produces the piece of paper.*) Was that the message you were expecting this morning? (ALICIA *reads it.*) What's the use of lying, ma'am, when you give yourself away by asking for it?

Alicia: But this is nothing to do with me; my message was about some fresh horses.

Colonel: Fresh rubbish! Speak the truth, can't you?

Alicia (rising with dignity): Really, sir, you are very offensive. I know you must have a great deal of anxiety and trouble, but that is hardly an excuse for speaking to a stranger and a lady as you do to me. (*A pause. She picks up her riding-crop and gloves.*) Well, I must be getting on.

Colonel (placing himself between her and the door): Where are you going, ma'am?

Alicia: On to Bridgewater, to see my uncle.

Colonel: You are not going yet.

Alicia: I am very sorry; I am afraid I can't stay any longer now, but I hope we shall meet another time.

She holds out her hand.

Colonel: Understand me—you are not going yet.

Alicia: I don't know what you mean, Colonel. But never mind, you must tell me everything when we meet again. Good-bye.

Colonel: Sit down, and listen to me quietly.

Alicia: I should love to do that, of course, but I wonder if I have time.

Colonel: It's not a question of time; I am detaining you in the execution of my military duty.

Alicia: Well, Colonel! I never knew you had it in you. I suppose I can stay just for a little, then, but—(*after a moment*)—I must speak to the ostler for a second, and tell him to water the horses.

Colonel (*very pompous*): I am sorry, madam, that's impossible. I cannot allow you to speak to anyone.

Alicia: Not speak to anyone! But this is ridiculous; you can't behave like this in the seventeenth century. (*As if struck with an idea.*). Tell me, are you a highwayman in disguise?

Colonel: Madam, I am an officer and an English gentleman.

Alicia: Oh, yes, of course. Fancy my forgetting it! Well, then, as an officer and an English gentleman, I request you to allow me to tell the ostler to water the horses.

Colonel (*gravely*): You make it very difficult for me. However, as you put it like that—— (*Out of the window.*) Ostler! (*To* ALICIA.) But, mind you, I shall be here all the time.

Alicia: I don't think that our conversation will compromise me. (OSTLER *enters.*) Oh, Frank, I wonder if you would mind watering the horses; I forgot to tell you.

Ostler: Yes, my lady.

Alicia: And don't saddle them for a few moments.

Ostler: No, my lady.

Alicia: I suppose you want to be paid. . . . I may pay him, Colonel?

Colonel (*with a grunt*): Yes, yes.

ALICIA *goes slowly towards him, takes two crowns from her purse, and holds them out to him. Their hands meet. The* COLONEL *watches with obvious impatience.*

Alicia (*with a little sigh*): There.

Ostler (*fingering the money, with an understanding look*): Thank you, my lady.

Alicia (*with a surprised and delighted glance*): Oh, I—oh, thank you; that's all, then. (*Exit* OSTLER.) There, Colonel: there was nothing suspicious about that, was there? (COLONEL *locks the door.*) It is much more suspicious to lock the door in that sinister manner.

Colonel (*confronting her*): I admire your courage, young lady.

Alicia: I am glad you admire something about me. But, you know, you are not old enough to talk like that.

Colonel: Keep to the point, madam. This is not a kind of game; there is a war going on, and very important issues at stake. The fact that you turn out to be a woman makes the situation very difficult for me; but I don't let scruples of that kind deter me from my duty, so I shall be

obliged if you will hand over those papers without delay.

Alicia: Papers? You mean—what *do* you mean?

Colonel (*irritably*): You know as well as I do. The plans of our attack on Chilton Trinity.

Alicia: But I haven't got them. I haven't got any papers—or plans—or anything at all. I am an ordinary young lady, travelling to see my uncle at Bridgewater.

Colonel (*raging*): Confound your uncle at Bridgewater! You'll soon see what comes of telling lies to me; you'll soon see whether I'm to be trifled with——

Alicia: I don't think you are behaving like an English officer and a—no, an English gentleman and a—no, *you* know what I mean——

Colonel (*restraining himself*): Can you understand that I am in a great hurry? I was stationed here to prevent you and your plans reaching the enemy, because Feversham thought me the best man for the job. Do you suppose that I intend to risk my reputation simply because you refuse to tell the truth?

Alicia (*gently*): And yet suppose, for a moment, that I am not the messenger, that I carry no papers of any kind. Then your reputation would suffer, too, wouldn't it?

Colonel: I am perfectly satisfied that you carry those papers upon your person.

Alicia: I know it is rude to be inquisitive, but would you mind telling me *why* you are so satisfied?

Colonel: I keep my eyes open, that's all. Among others things I—(*awkwardly*)—I observed that you blushed.

Alicia (*delighted*): Oh! The evidence is now complete. And yet, suppose that, after all, it turned out that I was not blushing, that it was only the firelight which——

Colonel: My dear madam, I am not altogether a fool. I said, among other things. You walked in here, you lied to me about Susan, and you asked for the message which was left for Monmouth's spy. Am I to disbelieve my own ears? Hand them over immediately.

Alicia (*rising slowly*): Well, I must really be getting on to Bridgewater.

Colonel (*furiously*): Sit down!

Alicia (*with spirit*): I refuse to sit down.

Colonel (*losing his temper*): Very well, then, stand up, confound you; but for God's sake stop arguing and give me those papers.

They face each other, both equally angry, in the middle of the room.

Alicia: I have not got any papers.

Colonel: I tell you, you have.

Alicia: I swear I have not.

Colonel: Plague take it, I know you have!

After a moment ALICIA, *with apparent capitulation, suddenly sits down.*

Alicia: Very well, Colonel, if you insist upon it, I suppose I have.

Colonel (*breathing a deep sigh of relief*): Ah! (*He wipes his forehead.*) That just shows how a woman can waste time. (*After some hesitation.*) I apologise if I was somewhat—firm; but, of course, you made it necessary. Now, when you have handed them over, I shall have the pleasure of allowing you to go on to Bridgewater under an escort.

Alicia: I am sorry to deprive you of the pleasure, Colonel. What I said was, that I had the papers: not that I would give them to you.

Colonel (*sharply*): No more of this, ma'am! Give them to me at once.

Alicia (*with mock sadness*): But I am obliged to *refuse*!

Colonel: Don't be ridiculous—you can't refuse. Haven't you any common sense? Do you realise that a sergeant and a squad of men are waiting outside? I can call them in at any moment.

Alicia: Yes, and the main army is only two miles away. Why don't you call them in, too? I think you ought to have sufficient support.

Colonel: Or I, myself, can take them from you with my own hands.

Alicia: Yes, that would be the simplest, wouldn't it? (*A pause.*) Are you going to?

The COLONEL *walks across the room and stops in front of her.*

Colonel: The devil take you, ma'am!

Alicia: You mean you can't. . . . That's what comes of trying to be an officer and an English gentleman at the same time. What a good thing for me that I'm a woman!

Colonel: Yes, and you have the impertinence to take advantage of it. But from now on, either behave as a woman should, or don't complain if I treat you like a man. Do you hear?

Alicia: Yes, yes, you needn't shout.

Colonel: I mean what I say. Your last chance, ma'am. Will you hand them over quietly, or not?

Alicia: Not.

Colonel: Very well.

Alicia: Very well.

Colonel (*grimly*): Very well.

Alicia: Very well. . . . We can't go on like this for ever, can we?

Colonel (*going to the window*): You shall see that I mean it. (*He turns again.*) This is your last chance, you know. (*He waits. She does not move. Shouting.*) Sergeant! Martin! Come in here.

Alicia: Fancy having to call in the Sergeant

to assist you with one woman! Don't they teach you in the army how to act by yourselves?

Colonel: There is nothing in the military statutes concerning the way one should deal with one enemy of the female sex. The situation is quite unprecedented.

Alicia: I wonder!

The COLONEL *unlocks the door.* MARTIN *enters and salutes.*

Colonel: Martin, you can dismiss the troop. I have found the man.

Martin: You have, sir? Where, sir?

Colonel (*pointing to* ALICIA)*:* There!

Martin: But that's a woman, sir.

Colonel: Don't argue, Sergeant; that woman's the man.

Martin: Well, I'm——

Colonel: And don't swear in the presence of a lady.

Martin: Sir. (*To* ALICIA.) You don't mean to say you've been taking it on yourself to carry them messages through? Who would have thought a young lady could have done that! Why, ma'am, you properly fooled us, and this a——

Colonel: That's enough, Sergeant. Have yo got your pistol?

Martin (*glancing apologetically at* ALICI Well —yes, sir.

Alicia: Yes, that would be the simplest, wouldn't it? (*A pause.*) Are you going to?

The COLONEL *walks across the room and stops in front of her.*

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Colonel: That's enough, Sergeant. Have yo got your pistol?

Martin (*glancing apologetically at* ALICIA): Well —yes, sir.

Colonel: Bring it out, then.

Martin (doing so): Yes, sir.

Colonel: I am now going to count ten. If, when I say the word ten, this lady has not handed over the papers in her possession, you are to shoot—at once.

Martin: To shoot, sir? Not the lady, sir?

Colonel: Yes, don't argue. Obey orders.

Alicia: You coward, Colonel, to make the poor Sergeant do it for you.

Colonel (punctilious to the last): It is not customary for an officer to shoot his prisoners.

Alicia: I see. Of course one cares so very much whom one is shot by.

The COLONEL *turns his back and begins to count. While he is counting,* ALICIA *sits peacefully by the fire, warming her hands, and the Sergeant stands by the table, the pistol levelled at her and his hand trembling.*

Colonel: One—two—three——

Alicia: Are you sure you won't miss, Sergeant?

Martin: I don't know, ma'am.

Alicia: Wouldn't you rather come closer?

Martin: Thank you, ma'am, I'm sure.

He moves slightly closer.

Colonel: Seven—eight—nine—— I said nine, ma'am! Ten!

A long pause.

Martin (*suddenly dropping the pistol*): Well, what the devil am I to do now, sir?

Colonel (*exasperated by his own agitation*): Do! Why the plague didn't you shoot, you fool?

Martin: I'm sorry, sir. I never shot a woman before in my life, and it somehow didn't seem natural. . . . Shall I try now, sir?

Colonel (*quickly*): No, of course not; it's too late now. You can't do it in cold blood. You've made a fine mess of things, haven't you? (*Striding up and down.*) The devil knows what I shall do next; I don't.

Alicia (*looking up*): Am I in heaven yet? Oh no, I can't be—there's the Colonel. What a disappointment!

Colonel: Yes, and you've only that fool to thank for it.

Alicia: Sergeant, you're not very brave, are you? (*To the* COLONEL.) Why don't you have a try?

Colonel (*losing his temper altogether*): Zounds, woman, dare to laugh at me again, and I'll blow your brains out! Do you imagine that I shall sit down under your confounded impudence? Am I the sort of man to be bluffed by a petticoat, to be prevented in the execution of my duty by a creature of the opposite sex, to be—— But I tell you one thing: I may not be able to force

you to hand over the plans—you may think you've won that way—but at least (*triumphantly*) you won't take them on to Bridgewater. I shan't let you past this inn, ma'am, though we sit here all to-day and all to-morrow.

Alicia: And all to-night, too?

Colonel: And all to-night, too.

Alicia: In this room?

Colonel: On this very spot.

Alicia (*looking round*): It will be rather uncomfortable, won't it? But perhaps I can make quite a good bed out of the window-seat, and you and the Sergeant will have to sleep on the floor. (*Cheerfully.*) It will be rather a joke, Colonel, don't you think?

Colonel: I do not. Martin, give me your pistol.

Martin (*relieved*): Here you are, sir.

The COLONEL *sits gravely at the table, and levels the pistol at* ALICIA.

Alicia: Are you going to sit like that all the time?

Colonel: You can stop me whenever you like by handing over the papers.

Alicia: Oh, I don't mind for myself. I was only thinking it would be rather tiring for you.

Colonel: I am trying to impress you with the fact that you are under arrest.

Alicia: Oh, thank you very much; but I

thought I must be, when you offered to shoot me. (*She yawns.*) A very stuffy day, isn't it; but the country people will be glad to get the rain. . . . Well, if we are going to sit here all the afternoon, I think I shall go to sleep. (*She closes her eyes.*) Don't shoot me when I'm asleep, will you? I want to go to heaven prepared. . . . (*Presently.*) Oh, Colonel, I am having a wonderful dream!

Colonel (*acidly*): Really?

Alicia: Yes. Of the Duke of Monmouth. He is in his tent, and suddenly the orderly appears with a packet. "What are those papers?" says the Duke. "I don't know, your Grace," says the orderly. Then he opens them. "Gad!" says the Duke, "they are the plans of the King's attack on us to-morrow. Gad!" he says, "Alicia Pemberton has not failed me, after all." . . . It is an inspiring sort of dream, isn't it?

Colonel: Thank God it won't be fulfilled!

Alicia: You wouldn't think it could be, would you? And yet, one never knows. Oh, well. . . . I would love something to eat, wouldn't you? (*She yawns, then suddenly.*) May I look out of the window?

Colonel: I suppose so.

ALICIA *goes to the window.*

Alicia (*looking out*): I can see Bridgewater from here, and—and—— (*She leans out.*) Oh, how wonderful!

Colonel (*rising anxiously—to the* SERGEANT): Is she going to jump out?

Martin: It's too high, sir.

Alicia (*watching something*): Yes—yes—it is—well done!

Colonel: Whatever is she looking at?

ALICIA *turns to them, her back to the window.*

Alicia (*radiantly*): Colonel—Sergeant—please don't look out for a moment. I want to tell you something. I know I oughtn't to, but I can't help it. I can't keep it to myself any longer.

Colonel: Well, what is it?

Alicia: You must forgive me, please, as you would any enemy in war. You see, I—really, you make me feel almost ashamed of it—but, you, see, I am now able to tell you that I have not got the papers at all.

Colonel, *Martin*—What!

Colonel: That's absurd, ma'am. Do you expect me to believe that now?

Alicia: I don't care whether you believe it or not, but it's true. And I am telling you this because I think—I know—they are safe in the Duke's hands at Bridgewater——

Colonel: It's not possible! Look how you——

Alicia: Yes, you're quite right, Colonel. I did have them. And I knew that you knew I

had. But do you remember when I told the ostler to water the horses ?

Colonel (*white with anxiety*) : Yes, but I thought of that. You couldn't do anything then : I was there all the time.

Alicia : But you let me pay him.

Colonel (*in great agitation*) : What do you mean ?

Alicia (*taking a crown from her purse*) : I made a very small copy of the plans and pasted them underneath a crown piece—in case of meeting emergencies, or—or people like you. (*Gently amused.*) So, you see, I tipped him with the plans.

Colonel (*preoccupied with the possibility of re-recovering them*) : I see. The ostler, was it ? He can't have got far, though. I gave orders that no one should pass this inn without my permission. (*To* MARTIN—*with sudden misgiving.*) Did you disobey those orders ?

Martin : I—well, you see, sir, he only went two or three hundred yards down the road, to fetch water for the horses. I didn't think he could do any harm.

Colonel (*furiously*) : Two or three hundred yards? Fetch water for your grandmother. You blazing fool, didn't I read aloud to you that a man was waiting down the road to carry on ? In front of him, too ! Dolt, idiot ! Go out and get after him, quick !

Alicia : There's no use doing that, Sergeant :

the papers are now in the hands of his Grace. It's only a mile, you know, and he rode full speed.

Colonel: May I ask why you are so sure of this?

Alicia: Look out of the window. Do you see in the distance something bright moving along the edge of the hill? There—no, there. Well, that's Monmouth's army. They know, now, where you mean to attack, and they are moving to meet you along the road to Farren Hill.

Colonel (*in a low voice*): Monmouth's army. Look there, Martin. It's true, I suppose?

Martin (*joining him*): Looks like it, sir. (*Cheerfully.*) We've been done, sir, and that's a fact!

Colonel: And while that fellow rode to Bridgewater with the plans, a—a *woman* kept me here and wasted time. (*Suddenly to* ALICIA.) Eh?

Alicia (*modestly*): That was my idea, Colonel. It only shows how a woman can waste time.

Colonel (*turning abruptly from her*): Go out and mount the men, Sergeant, and ride back to Western Zoyland. Send some one post-haste to warn Feversham. Tell him—— (*He pauses.*) Tell him that I've failed, and that Monmouth has the plans. I'll be after you in a moment.

Martin: Right, sir.

Exit MARTIN.

Alicia (*who has been watching sympathetically*): Am I your prisoner, Colonel?

Colonel: No, you'd only get in the way.

He goes to table, gathering up his gloves, map, etc.

Alicia: That is very nice of you. (*Later.*) Colonel!

Colonel: What is it now?

Alicia: Do you think we shall ever meet after the war is over?

Colonel: I don't know. Possibly—if I'm still alive.

Alicia: You ought not to think of me as an enemy, then.

Colonel: I shall think of you as the most charming enemy I ever had the misfortune to meet. (*Stopping, astonished at himself.*) What nonsense! I don't suppose I shall ever forgive you.

Alicia: Oh, don't spoil it, Colonel: it was such a delightful speech.

Colonel: Gad, ma'am, if you were only a man, what a fine one you'd make!

Alicia: Oh, no, I shouldn't. It's only because I'm a woman that I—am what I am.

Colonel (*with an effort coming to take her hand*): Madam, I should like to tell you that if we had met in any other way——

Alicia: Yes?

Martin (*outside*): The men are ready, sir.

Colonel (*suddenly himself again*): Great heavens,

what do you mean by keeping me waiting like this? (*As he exits.*) Fall in the men, Sergeant. Is my horse saddled?

The door bangs.

Alicia (*looking after him*): What a pity! (*She goes to the window and calls out.*) Good-bye, Colonel! I hope you are a General by the time we next meet. Good-bye! (*Sound of horses trotting out of the yard.* ALICIA *comes back into the middle of the room with a sigh, then calls.*) Susan!

Susan (*entering*): Yes, my lady?

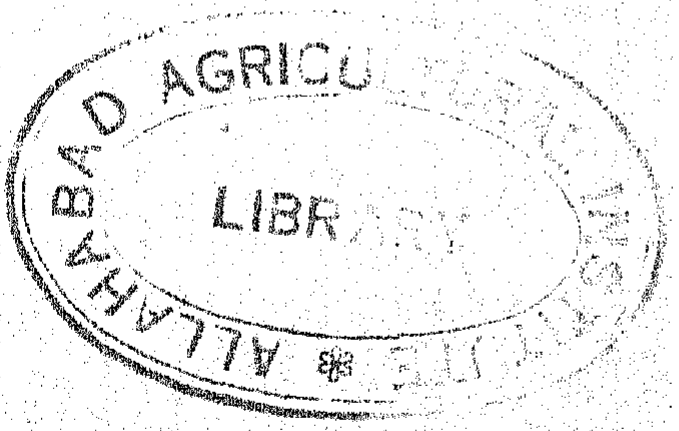
Alicia (*suddenly exhausted*): Oh, Susan! Can I have a cup of hot tea, please?

CURTAIN

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THE RECOIL

ERIC LOGAN



CHARACTERS

LIEUTENANT MALONE.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT DENNY.

CAPTAIN FRITH, *medical officer.*

PRIVATE WILKS, *officers' batman*

THE RECOIL

SCENE: *An officers' sleeping hut in a military outpost in India. The hut is barely furnished with camp equipment: a camp-bed at each end; a small table with a candle thereon, which gives the only light; a box of matches beside candle; a packing-case or two. Door back.*

The time is late in an evening of early June. The monsoon is due, and it is hot and stifling.

Sounds of Eastern music, weird and monotonous, are heard in the distance, swelling louder whenever the hut door is open.

In the hut are two subaltern officers: LIEUTENANT MALONE, *an Ulster Irishman with a slight brogue, and* SECOND-LIEUTENANT DENNY, *a young Englishman not long out of Sandhurst.* MALONE *is sitting at the table, reading by the light of the candle;* DENNY *is taking off his puttees, boots, and tunic, preparatory to going to bed. Every now and then* DENNY *throws a hostile look at* MALONE, *who is quite oblivious of it. Several times* DENNY *is on the point of speaking, but checks himself.*

After a brief interval, silent except for the drone of the music, a knock on the hut door is heard.

Malone: Come in! (*Enter* CAPTAIN FRITH, *the medical officer.*) It's the Doc, so it is!

The Indian music is heard more loudly when the door is open.

Frith: I thought I'd drop in for a smoke before turning in.

Malone: And it's welcome ye are. (*Indicating a packing-case.*) Take an easy-chair.

Frith (*turns packing-case upside down, squats on it, and takes out his cigarette-case*): Thanks, I will. (*Handing case.*) Gasper, Malone?

Takes cigarette himself.

Malone (*taking cigarette*): Sure, I'd love the darlint! (*Strikes one of the matches kept on the table and holds it for* FRITH.) Never be lighting a fag from a candle, Doc. I lost a good moustache that way once.

Frith (*laughs and offers cigarette-case to* DENNY): You, Denny?

Denny (*abruptly*): No, thanks. It's too blasted hot to smoke.

Frith: It *is* a bit oppressive.

Denny: Oppressive! It's stifling!

Frith: It will be cooler when the rains come.

Denny: Gosh! I'll be glad to be quit of this plague spot! Wish I'd never volunteered for foreign service!

Malone: It's poor solace for an exiled soul, is Denny these days.

Denny: I loathe India, and this outpost duty worst of all—miles from civilisation, with nothing to do but catch the plague or be bitten by a snake.

Frith: None of us exactly revels in it.

Malone: Och! It's got to be done, it has; and it's not soothing, nor is it, to have a man in yer hut that expects a visit from the divil at any moment.

Frith (*half amused*): What *are* you driving at?

Denny: Malone thinks he's funny. But it's no fun for me.

Frith (*struck by* DENNY'S *serious tone, and studying him closely*): What's the trouble, Denny?

Denny: It's a vile, putrid feeling I've got, Doc—just here (*clasps abdomen*)—a feeling that something's going to happen.

Frith: We've all got it. It's the monsoon.

Denny: No, Doc, it isn't the monsoon with me.

Malone: Faith, it'll be nothing worse than the stomach-ache.

Denny: Oh, stow it, Malone! You'd never understand.

Frith (*sympathetically and professionally*): Try and explain, Denny.

Denny: I don't know if I can. The feeling is so eerie, Doc—so weird and uncanny. I know it forebodes something terrible and terrifying.

Frith (*soothingly*): Rubbish, my dear chap!

It's just a silly presentiment, that's all. It's not uncommon at this season. You want to push it right out of your head.

Malone: And out of the hut, too, bejabers!

Denny (*irritably to* MALONE): Oh, you'd feel cheerful on the night of your execution!

Frith (*seriously*): Look here, my lad, you must get a grip on yourself! This bogey-seeing won't do at all. You're a little run down; that's all that's the matter. You're not acclimatised yet.

Denny: It's not just the heat. I *know* something tragic is going to happen.

Frith: Nonsense! Why should anything tragic happen?

A cry off.

Denny (*jumps*): What was that?

Immediately there is a fierce altercation off. All three officers turn to listen. Then a perfunctory knock, and PRIVATE WILKS, *the officers' batman, a typical humorous type of British Tommy, enters.*

Malone: And what will ye be after, Wilks?

Wilks: Beggin' yer pardon, sir. It's for the medical orficer.

Frith: For me, Wilks?

Wilks: Yes, sir. (*Pointing off.*) There's an Indian bloke from the village, sir—seems a bit 'xcited.

Frith: Did he say what he wanted?

Wilks : Fer as I could make out, sir, someone's bin bit by a snake.

Frith (*jumping up at once*) *:* Have they, by Jove ? I must run. Not a moment to lose. See you fellows later.

Exit FRITH, *in a great hurry, followed by* WILKS. MALONE *returns to his book.* DENNY *proceeds with his undressing.*

Denny : Gosh ! What a damnable country !

Malone : Faith, there're many worse !

Denny : God help them, then !

Malone : Sure, we all need God's help wherever we are. But I've been in places I needed it more than I do here.

Denny : Have you ? Well, I don't see what could be worse than this steaming oven of plague and poison.

Malone : Maybe India's got its share of horrors, Denny ; but there's the other side of the picture —all the romance of the East, the mysterious influence of a past that stretches back to the cloudy dawn of history.

Denny : Now you talk like a guide-book !

Malone : Och ! Ye should try and make the best of things. After all, ye've got a whole lot to be thankful for.

Denny (*incredulously*) *:* I have !

Malone : Sure, ye have ! Ye've only got the climate to put up with. Take some of these Indian

bhoys now. They don't only put up with the climate, but they lie on beds of nails and walk over hot cinders, just to prevent them getting too contented with things.

Denny: I couldn't sleep less than I do on a bed of nails.

Malone: But if it's not sleeping ye are, ye can thank yer stars ye're lying on a nice comfy bit of canvas.

Denny: I suppose those are gems from the confounded books you're always reading.

Malone: Ye're no friend of my philosophical books, Denny. But philosophy has its uses—sure it has! It can act as a sort of drug.

Denny: Well, it's a drug that has no effect on me.

Malone: But ye've never tried it.

Denny: And don't mean to, either.

Malone: Faith, ye're a hopeless case! (MALONE *resumes his reading, while* DENNY *continues his undressing. Re-enter* PRIVATE WILKS, *leaving the door open, and enabling the Indian music to be heard very plainly.*) Ye're back again, are ye, Wilks? What will it be this time?

Wilks: The Sergeant-Major'd like to speak to yer, sir.

Denny (*testily*): Shut the damned door! We can't hear a thing with that dirge at full blast!

WILKS *shuts the door, and damps down the music.*

Wilks (*repeating to* MALONE): The Sergeant-Major, sir. 'E'd like to speak to yer.

Malone (*not wishing to be disturbed*): Och! Tell him to go and fry his face.

Wilks (*pleased*): Fry 'is face! (*Turns to go.*) Very good, sir.

Malone (*calling him back*): Wait!

Wilks (*looks disappointed*): Not fry 'is face, sir?

Malone: Why, no, ye spalpeen! Say I'll be coming.

Wilks: Yes, sir. (*Muttering.*) Pity 'bout 'is face, though. It could of done with a bit o' fryin'.

Malone (*sharply*): What's that ye're saying, Wilks?

Wilks: Nuffin', sir. Just a touch o' the "bronchs."

Thumps his chest. Exit. MALONE *sighs, puts down his book, stands up, and buckles on his belt.*

Malone: Sure, orderly officers must be wicked bhoys. There's no rest for them.

Denny (*in grumbling tone*): And precious little rest for those who aren't orderly officers.

Malone: Och! A young fellow like you, Denny, ought to be sleeping like a log—heat or no heat.

Denny: That damned candle of yours doesn't help, Malone. I wasn't brought up on night-lights.

Malone: And am I to be sitting in the dark

all the hours I'm on duty? I must do something to keep meself awake, I must; and it's a good book that does it best.

Denny (*sarcastically*): One of your mouldy books on philosophy?

Malone: A book to make ye think, yes; and a book to help ye make the best of things.

Denny: Once I could rely on any book, even a thriller, to send me to sleep. *Half* a page of philosophy would do the trick. But a lullaby would fail in this heat. (*Gasps for breath.*) It's hell!

Malone: Ye can't expect to get any sleep in hell, Denny. Where would be the hell of it, if ye could be sleeping all the time?

Denny: Jokes and insomnia don't go well together, Malone.

Malone: Sure, I've heard jokes I'd back against a sleeping draught.

Denny: They weren't your sort of jokes, then.

Malone: Faith, that's true. My jokes lift the burden of care from the aching back.

Denny (*caustically*): They must be mighty small cares or very straight backs. You only add to mine.

Malone: Denny, ye're a companion to try even a philosopher.

Denny: And you're a philosopher to make an insomniast—or whatever the confounded word is.

Malone: Och, well! I'll be off. (MALONE, *now*

ready for duty, walks to the door, which opens to admit WILKS. *The batman stands aside.*) Is the Sergeant-Major waiting, Wilks?

Wilks: Yes, sir—face and all.

Exit MALONE. WILKS *closes the door after him, partly smothering the persistent uncanny music.* WILKS *then walks up to* DENNY'S *bed, and picks up the puttees and starts to roll them.* DENNY *gets on to his bed.*

Denny: How does this Indian music strike you, Wilks?

Wilks: Well, sir, I can't say as 'ow I'm struck of an 'eap.

Denny: You're lucky. I wish I wasn't.

Wilks: Yer don't mean to say yer likes it, sir!

Denny (*witheringly*): Like it! Lord! I can't stand it!

Wilks: Meself, I prefers summat like "Pack up yer Troubles."

Denny: Gosh! I think that's worse.

Wilks (*surprised*): Do yer, sir? Now, "Pack up yer Troubles" and "Take me back to Blighty," along of 'alf a pint o' the best, kind o' puts silver linin' in a smoke-screen fer me.

Denny: I wish I was as easily satisfied as you, Wilks.

Wilks: It's 'abit, sir—that's what it is. If I was to wait fer summat to be satisfied with—blimey!—I'd never be satisfied at all. So I sees

I just 'as to go on bein' satisfied wi' nuffin', or I shan't get no satisfaction out o' life no'ow.

Denny: Gosh! Another philosopher! The place is alive with them.

Wilks: Shall I get the Keatings, sir?

Denny: No! They'd thrive on it!

During the dialogue WILKS *is busy all the time folding up* DENNY'S *tunic, etc., and tidying up the hut.*

(*Indicating the direction of the music.*) Talking of satisfaction, I suppose that blighter out there gets a kick out of making that fiendish row.

Wilks: Shouldn't wonder, sir. But I'm not surprised it gets on yer nerves, sir. I bet yer likes the good music—"She's me Old-fashioned Sweetie," or summat o' that.

Denny (*groans*): The whole crazy world is crooning to its sweetie. It makes me sick.

Wilks: Don't 'xactly give *me* a appetite, sir, neither. (*Cocking his thumb over his shoulder.*) D'yer think that bloke's croonin' to 'is sweetie, sir?

Denny (*wearily*): Oh, I expect so.

Wilks: 'Struth! She must be as long as a python!

Denny: But not so well marked.

Wilks: She would be if I got at 'er.

Denny: It's him you want to get at, Wilks.

Wilks: Dunno so much, sir. No man makes a

mug of 'isself like that unless some woman encourages 'im.

Denny: It's hard to imagine even an Indian woman encouraging that. (*Shivers.*) Ugh! It gives me the creeps.

Wilks: I 'spect the women 'ere are like the men, sir: never really 'appy unless they're torturin' theirselves.

Denny: Indiá's a weird place, Wilks—an eerie, awesome, ghastly sort of place.

Wilks: Daft, I calls it, sir.

Denny: It makes me feel as if everything's unnatural, unwholesome. I can't get a proper hold of things. I can't feel any solid ground under my feet. Does it affect you like that, Wilks?

Wilks: Well, I *'ave* felt that way, sir.

Denny (*eager for any fellow-feeling*): Ah! Have you, Wilks?

Wilks: Oh, I 'ave, sir. But the C.O. put it down to the canteen, and gave me ten days' C.B.

Denny (*disgusted*): Too many pints of philosophy, I suppose. (*Enter* FRITH, *looking very dejected. Indian music as before.*) Halloa, Doc! You're back soon.

Frith: Too soon, Denny. (*Sadly.*) I could do nothing.

Denny: Gosh! Who was the victim?

Frith: A young native girl—pretty little thing, too.

Denny: What got her?

Frith: A cobra.

Denny: Poor wretch! (*In a sudden outburst.*) God in Heaven! What a hell of a place this is! I wish I'd never set eyes on it! It either poisons you or roasts you to a cinder. Blast the heat! Is there no relief from it?

Frith (*walking over to* DENNY'S *bed and studying him closely*): The monsoon will break any time now. You will be right as rain then. Sounds like a rotten joke, but it was quite unintentional. (*Offering his cigarette-case.*) Here, take a gasper. It will calm you down.

Denny (*helping himself*): All right, Doc; perhaps it will. Sometimes I get so wrought up. . . .

Frith (*patting his shoulder soothingly*): I know, I know. It's trying at first for all of us. You'll settle down. Now, light up. Got a match?

Denny: Chuck over Malone's box, will you? There—on the table.

Frith (*throwing box*): Catch!

DENNY *lights a cigarette and sits up, puffing away meditatively.* WILKS, *who has been busy putting the hut straight, gives it a few final touches.*

Wilks (*coming forward and bending down to lift up* DENNY'S *boots*): Will there be anything more to-night, sir?

Denny: No, Wilks. And you can leave those boots till the morning.

Wilks: Very good, sir.

Puts down boots again by DENNY'S *bed, then turns to go.*

Denny: Before you go, though, take these matches and throw them under Mr. Malone's bed.

Wilks (*astonished*): Under the bed, sir!

Denny: That's what I said.

Wilks (*hesitating to obey so extraordinary an order*): But Mr. Malone may be wantin' 'em, sir!

Denny: Obey orders!

Wilks (*obediently*): Yes, sir.

Frith (*protestingly*): Really, Denny. . . .

Denny (*viciously*): It's my business, Doc.

FRITH *shrugs his shoulders, as if indicating that* DENNY *must be humoured, and takes refuge in silence.* WILKS *walks over to* MALONE'S *bed, and, with great deliberation, throws the matches underneath it. He gives* DENNY *a look, suggesting that he doubts his sanity, and then makes for the door.*

Wilks (*with a furtive glance at* DENNY): Good-night, sir.

Denny (*shortly*): Good-night.

Wilks (*pleasantly to* FRITH): Good-night, sir.

Frith: Oh, good-night, Wilks. (*Exit* WILKS. *Pointing to where the matches have been thrown.*) And now, my lad, perhaps you'll give a reason for doing so extraordinary a thing as that.

Denny: Malone *will* read all night when he's on duty. He says it keeps him awake.

Frith: That doesn't hurt you, does it?

Denny: It does—it's maddening. It keeps me awake, too. I find it hard enough to sleep in this sweltering heat without having a searchlight blazing in my eyes all night.

Frith (*surveying the candle*): Some searchlight!

Denny: Quite powerful enough. Besides, Malone clogs the hut up with books of philosophy, which I can't stick at any price.

Frith: A little philosophy isn't a bad thing in a place like this.

Denny: Gosh! Are you another of them?

Frith: I think philosophy has its uses. It helps one to be more tolerant.

Denny: Tolerant of what?

Frith: Well, reading at night, for instance.

Denny (*explosively*): Hell!

Frith: Look here, my lad; I'm going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle. You're letting this place get the better of you. It won't do.

Denny: Is it surprising, when I feel that any minute something frightful, something awful, might happen?

Frith: Don't keep harping on that!

Denny: I can't help it, Doc. You know yourself it might.

Frith: Rubbish!

Denny: Think of that wretched girl. Alive and

happy one moment: dead, killed by a cobra, the next.

Frith: That was just a case of cruel luck.

Denny: But it might happen to any of us.

Frith: As if that's likely.

Denny: Why not?

Frith: Well, our circumstances are somewhat different. This poor girl, you see, lived in one of those rickety old houses, so common in this part of India.

Denny: Dens of filth!

Frith: Possibly. But, from our point of view, their worst feature is the crafty hiding-places they provide for snakes.

Denny: Which snakes take full advantage of.

Frith: They do. But they're quite passive till they are disturbed.

Denny: How did the girl disturb the cobra, then?

Frith: As far as I could make out, she was busy sweeping out the house, and poked the end of her brush into a crevice in the wall. As ill-luck would have it, the cobra was inside.

Denny: The brush frightened it, I suppose.

Frith: Yes. Naturally it took it for an enemy, and, in its alarm, struck out and caught the poor girl on the wrist.

Denny: What did she do?

Frith: Well, I don't think we need pursue the story. It's not a very pleasant one.

Denny: I must hear the end now.

Frith: I shouldn't. I should lie down and get some sleep.

Denny: I couldn't, Doc. (*Insistently.*) Go on!

Frith (*shrugging shoulders*): All right, if you insist. Well, then: mad with terror, the girl flew yelling and screaming to her parents. They got panic-stricken and lost their heads. Instead of binding up the arm at once, they came rushing over to the camp for me.

Denny: It wasn't far, then?

Frith: Oh, no; not more than a couple of minutes off. But, of course, I wasn't in my hut; and by the time they had traced me here precious time had been lost.

Denny: Could you have saved her?

Frith: I might have done if I could have put on the tourniquet and cauterised the wound at once. Even so it's doubtful.

Denny: I wonder if it hurts much—snake-bite, I mean.

Frith: With a cobra the first few minutes are agony; but when the virus has entered the circulation paralysis sets in, the patient loses consciousness, and death is swift.

Denny (*shivers*): Ugh! Horrible!

Frith: You would hear the story.

Denny: I know. But what a country!

Frith: Of course, we are making progress and reducing the yearly toll of snakes. To-day. . . . (*Breaks off, and holds up his finger.*) Listen!

While FRITH *has been speaking the foregoing sentence a sudden sound of falling rain has broken the stillness of the Indian night.*

(*Joyfully.*) The rains! (*The sound of the heavy rain quickly increases in intensity. The weird Indian music comes to an abrupt end.*) I think I'll skip over to my own hut.

Denny: It's only a few yards.

Frith: I know; but quite far enough to get a thorough wetting.

Denny: As you like, Doc.

Frith: Good-night, Denny. And, mind: no more of those stupid presentiments. Tell them in your best voice of command to "Dismiss!"

Denny: Wish I could, Doc. So long! (*Exit* FRITH, *closing the hut door after him.*) Thank the Lord that death chant's stopped, anyway! Let's have some air! (*Jumps out of bed, and flings the door of the hut wide open. He stands before it, drinking in the fresh air brought by the rains. He opens the front of his shirt and rolls up his sleeves. He raises his arms above his head, while he takes several deep breaths.*) Ah! That's better! (*After a minute or so he crosses to* MALONE'S *table, glances, with a sardonic smile, under the bed where* WILKS *has thrown the matches, then, with great deliberation, blows out the candle, exclaiming peevishly*): Light it again if you can! (*He gropes noisily in the gloom for his bed, and is heard to scramble in,*

murmuring to himself.) So much for your philosophy! Now perhaps I *can* sleep! (*A short silence, during which* DENNY *is heard breathing deeply and evenly while the rain is splashing down. He commences to talk in his sleep.*) Rain . . . rain falling on the parched earth . . . falling, falling . . . beautiful cool rain. . . . What a lovely sound! . . . I can smell the wet soil . . . the scent of the bracken in our copsewood. . . . Home! Home!

There is a brief interval of complete silence, broken only by the swishing of the rain. The sounds of footsteps are then heard approaching the hut. Soon MALONE *re-enters, noisily, carrying a torch, which, however, gives only a feeble light.*

Malone: And who, in hell's name, has been leaving this door ajar? Faith, it's as wet as a water-rat I am. (MALONE *appears very wet, shakes himself, and prepares to take off his boots and leggings.*) Is it asleep ye are, Denny? (DENNY *snorts.*) So ye are asleep at last! And a lucky thing ye are, or a lecture ye'd be getting.

Denny (*viciously*): Gosh, Malone! Can't you ever keep that mouth of yours shut?

Malone: I thought ye were sleeping now.

Denny: So I was, till you came floundering in with your heavy boots and raucous voice.

Malone: Och, well! Ye'd left the door open wide, and the candle had blown out.

Denny: I wanted to let some air in.

Malone: And it's more than air ye'll be letting in, I'm thinking. D'ye not know snakes will creep in anywhere for shelter? Always keep the doors shut when the rains come. Ye'll sure learn that when ye've been out here a season or two.

Drops a boot on the floor.

Denny (ill-naturedly): All right, Saint Patrick.

Malone: Sure, India could do with a Saint Patrick or two. But where the divil is the candle? This torch of mine will be as dead as Saint Patrick soon.

Denny: Can't you give reading a miss to-night, Malone, and let me sleep?

Malone: Faith, ye'll sleep all right. I'll not be disturbing ye.

Denny: You will if you light that candle.

Malone: Divil a bit!

Denny: Anyone would think you *wanted* to keep me awake—that you took a sort of fiendish delight in seeing me suffer.

Malone (taken aback, and dropping his other boot on the floor): Ye could not be meaning that, Denny—not seriously?

Denny: Yes, I could. That's what it looks like to me. You said yourself philosophy was a kind

of drug. (*With conviction.*) Gosh! I have it. It's you who are more maddened and frightened by this blasted country than I am—you who hide your fear under a pretence of cheerfulness, and are trusting to your philosophy to save you from going crazy.

Malone (*sternly*): Be pulling yerself together, man! To suspect the people round ye is lunatic babble, so it is.

Denny (*almost shouting*): I know what I'm saying, Malone. And I believe you're taking a devilish delight in torturing me. I swear I believe it. You've been polluted by these filthy Eastern practices.

Malone (*alarmed*): Wait till I get ye a whisky, Denny. That'll buck ye up. Ye'll feel yourself again in no time. I must light the candle, though. This torch of mine is setting like the sun.

Denny: Don't think you can fool me like that! You want the candle to read by, not to help me.

Malone: Ye'll be seeing. (*Groping over the table.*) Where have ye put the matches, now?

Denny (*threateningly*): Malone, if you try to light that candle I'll throw a boot at it.

Malone: It's for yer own good, bhoy.

Denny: I'll fling a boot at it, I say! I mean it.

Malone (*jocularly*): That'll be all right, Denny. It's no marksman ye are.

Denny (*explosively*): Hell! (*Reaches for one of*

his boots, and hurls it across the hut.) Take that, then!

Malone: Saint Patrick!

DENNY'S *boot strikes* MALONE'S *torch as it hurtles across the hut, which is at once plunged into darkness. The thud and a tinkle of broken glass is heard as boot and torch fall on the floor.*

Malone (*crossly*): It's a fool ye are, Denny!

The words are followed by a blood-curdling yell from DENNY.

Denny: Malone! Malone! A cobra! (*His voice rises to an agonised shriek.*) *A cobra!*

Malone: Christ save us! Keep still, man!

Denny (*in terror*): A cobra, Malone! I can see its eyes—its hood—swaying.

Malone (*excitedly*): Blast ye! Keep still, I tell ye!

Denny: Can't you hear it—hissing?

Malone: Wait till I strike a light.

Denny: Quick, Malone! *Quick!*

Malone: Where are the matches? Divil take them!

Denny: The matches! Oh, God help me! I—— (*He lets out a terrible yell.*) Malone! He's got me! He's got me, Malone!

Malone: The matches, in hell's name!

Enter WILKS, *brought in hastily by the shrieks. He is very scared. The opening of the*

door lets more light into the hut, and the figures of the men can be distinguished. MALONE *is seen feeling all over the table for the matches.* DENNY *is sitting bolt upright, moaning.*

Wilks (*scared*): A-a-anything wrong, sir?

Malone: Is it you, Wilks? To the M.O., quick! Mr. Denny's been bitten!

Wilks (*aghast*): Gawd!

Turns to run.

Malone (*calling him back*): Wait! Chuck me a match first.

Wilks: Ain't got one on me, sir.

Malone: Where are mine, then?

Wilks: Under the bed, sir. Mr. Denny told me to throw 'em there.

DENNY, *in agony, cannot articulate, as a result of the poison, and makes ghastly noises in his throat.* MALONE *drops to his knees, and starts groping under the bed.*

(*Alarmed.*) Oh, look out, sir! The snake may be there still.

Malone: To the M.O., ye fool! Don't be blithering there!

Exit WILKS *in a great hurry.* DENNY'S *moans grow fainter.* MALONE, *with much grovelling, at length recovers the matches. The few moments of suspense have been terrific, punc-*

tuated by MALONE'S *explosive curses. In spite of much fumbling, due to his anxiety,* MALONE *succeeds in lighting the candle.* DENNY *can now be seen, in a stiffening sitting posture.* MALONE *approaches the bed.*

Where did he nip ye, Denny? (DENNY, *paralysed, can only gasp.*) For Christ's sake, speak, man! (*No answer.*) Where, now?

Still no answer. As MALONE *feverishly examines the stricken* DENNY, *looking for the puncture, there is the sound of running footsteps and excited voices approaching. Enter, at a run,* FRITH, *half dressed, his medical case in his hand. He is closely followed by* WILKS, *who carries a large lantern, which sheds a good light in the hut.*

Frith: Where did it get him?

Malone: He never said, Doc—never a word. (*As* FRITH *reaches the bed* DENNY *falls back, with a gurgle in his throat. Both* FRITH *and* MALONE *bend over the prostrate form.*) What's this in his arm, Doc?

Frith (*examining the spot pointed out by* MALONE): That's the place. Hold the lantern higher, Wilks.

For a few seconds there is silence in the hut, except for the heavy breathing of the men. FRITH *is busy binding up* DENNY'S *arm tightly above the wound.* MALONE *waits in a condition*

of acute anxiety, pacing up and down the hut. The more stolid WILKS *stands still, holding the lantern aloft.*

(*Calling* MALONE *to the bed.*) Here! Help me to pull this tight.

Together FRITH *and* MALONE *fix the tourniquet.*

Malone (*anxiously*): Will he be all right, Doc?

Frith: Get some boots on, Malone. Do you want to be bitten, too?

Malone: Sure, I forgot. (MALONE *drags on his boots, while* FRITH *still works on* DENNY. *Insistently.*) Will ye be saving him? Will ye, now?

Frith (*ignoring the question, as he pours out a glass of mixture from his case*): Give me a hand to lift him up while he drinks this. (*They struggle with* DENNY'S *body, and raise him to a sitting position. There they hold him, while* FRITH *puts the glass to his lips.*) All right, lower him again.

Malone (*lowering* DENNY): Did he take it, Doc?

Frith: No, Malone. He couldn't. He's dead.

Malone: Save us!

Wilks (*overawed*): Gawd!

Frith (*tragically*): We're too late, Malone.

Malone: I sent at once.

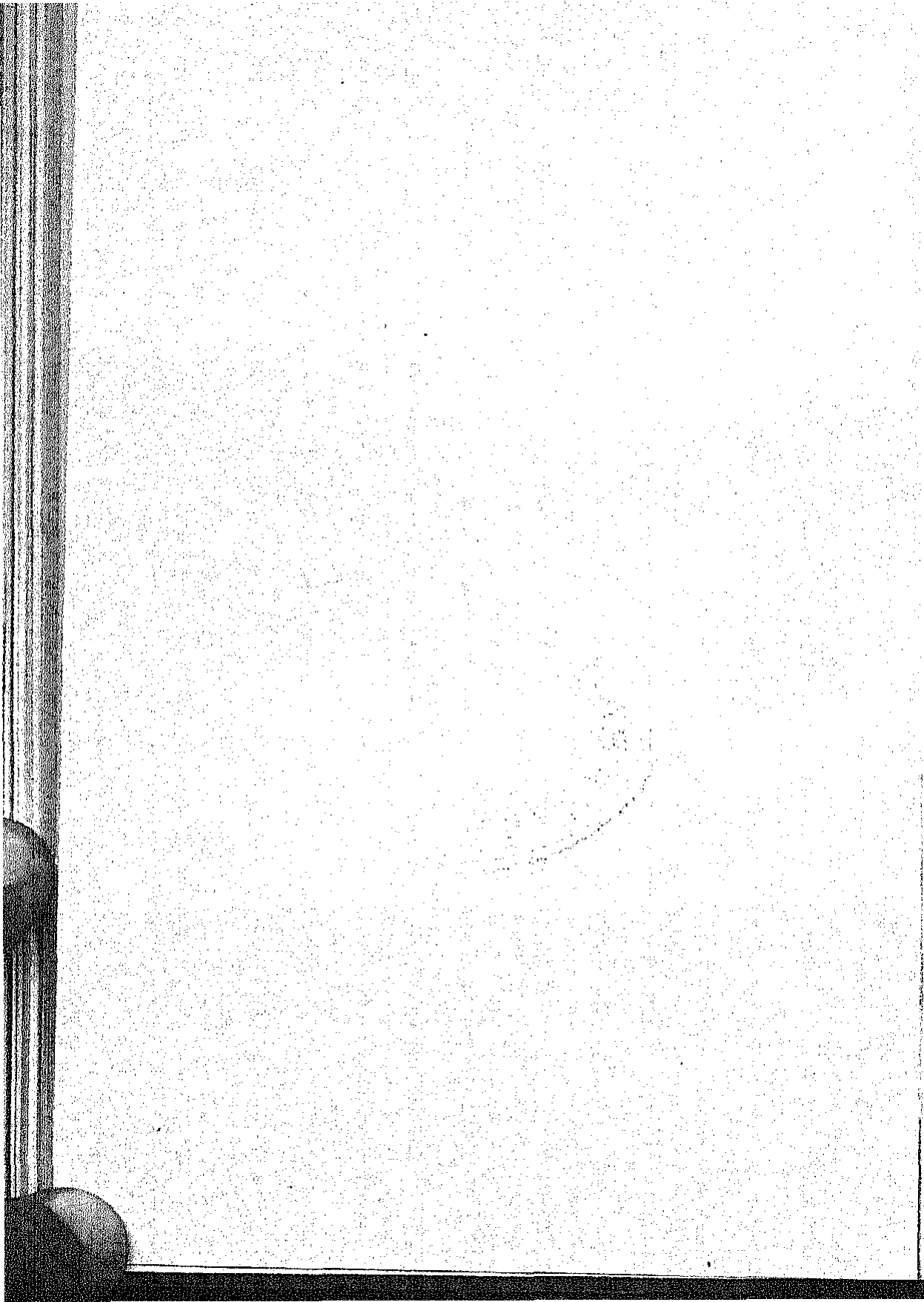
Frith: If we could have bound up the arm on the instant. . . .

Malone: Sure I would, Doc; but I'd no light. He'd hidden my matches.

Frith (realising the full tragedy): Oh, my God!

CURTAIN

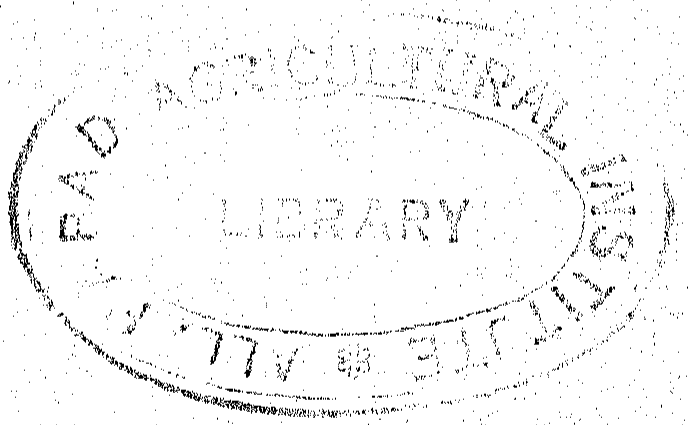
Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs. J. B. Pinker and Son, Talbot House, Arundel Street, London, W.C.2.



MEET MRS. BEETON

A Culinary Comedy

L. DU GARDE PEACH



CHARACTERS

MRS. JENNINGS, *a middle-aged Victorian matron, rather acid in her manner. She is dressed in an evening gown of the period, with a crinoline. It will help to characterise her if her hair is drawn straight back from her forehead, and a large cameo brooch fastens her lace fichu.*

PHOEBE, *a rather slatternly young domestic of the period, given to adenoids. She should wear a mob cap.*

MR. JENNINGS, *a pompous Victorian gentleman of about fifty, with abundant Dundreary whiskers. He is in evening dress—a tail coat, with a very large black silk bow tie and a black waistcoat. A red silk handkerchief is tucked into his waistcoat.*

MRS. BEETON, *a charming Victorian girl of about twenty. She has a wreath of small flowers in her hair and a light-coloured evening frock, off the shoulders, and a crinoline.*

MR. BEETON, *a younger edition of* MR. JENNINGS, *about twenty-five. He is rather shy in his manner. He and* MRS. BEETON *are hopelessly in love with one another and are what the period would describe as a "devoted couple."*

The Period is roughly 1860.

MEET MRS. BEETON

SCENE: MRS. JENNINGS' *dining-room, and a table is laid for dinner for four people.*

The scene should be made to look as much like an ordinary Victorian dining-room as possible—a window, heavily lace-curtained at the back, complete with an aspidistra, and ornaments and pictures of the period will materially help.

There must, of course, be nothing modern about the setting of the dinner table—it should have a white cloth hanging almost to the floor, and there should be some hideous ornament in the middle of it—a basket of wax fruit or some similar atrocity.

It is not necessary to show a fireplace, and for the purpose of the action, there need only be four chairs.

There are two doors—one on the right into a reception room, and one at the back, in the corner on the left, into a kitchen.

MRS. JENNINGS *is standing watching* PHOEBE, *the domestic, who is laying the table under her eagle eye.*

Mrs. Jennings: The soup spoons, Phoebe.

Phoebe: I've forgot them, mum.

Mrs. Jennings: Well, fetch them, girl, fetch them.

Phoebe: Yes'm.

PHOEBE *goes out as* MR. JENNINGS *comes in.*

Mr. Jennings (*pompously*): Very elegant, Mrs. Jennings—very elegant indeed. The table does credit to your good taste.

Mrs. Jennings (*rather acidly*): If a woman of my experience cannot arrange a dinner table——

Mr. Jennings: I think dear Aunt Amelia's gift just a *leetle* more—so.

He moves the wax fruit.

Mrs. Jennings (*firmly*): No, Mr. Jennings. The centre or nothing.

She moves it back again.

Mr. Jennings: But that is not the centre, my love.

Mrs. Jennings: Are you presuming to tell me which is the centre of my own dining table?

Mr. Jennings (*pompously*): Come, come, Agatha. Do not adopt a tone unbecoming to a female, As head of this household——

He moves the fruit.

Mrs. Jennings: No.

She moves it back.

Mr. Jennings: You are stubborn, Mrs. Jennings.

Mrs. Jennings: And you are cock-eyed, Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings (*with wrathful dignity*): Are you aware, Mrs. Jennings, that you have just employed a word to your husband which——

PHOEBE *comes in.*

Mrs. Jennings (*quickly cutting in*): Not before the domestic, Cuthbert.

Phoebe: If you please, 'm, I can't find the soup spoons, mum.

Mrs. Jennings: Have you looked in the cutlery cabinet——

Mr. Jennings (*picking up the line*): The one presented to me by my employees on the occasion of my silver wedding.

Phoebe (*impressed*): Lor', no, sir.

Mr. Jennings: Then look, girl, look.

Phoebe: Yes, sir.

She goes out.

Mr. Jennings: It is a singular thing, Mrs. Jennings, that every person introduced into this house by you should be half-witted.

Mrs. Jennings: I introduced *you* into it, Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings (*majestically*): Mrs. Jennings,

do not aggravate me this evening, I beg of you. Please remember that I wish to preserve that calmness of demeanour which should characterise a publisher of refined books. Besides, it is necessary that I should practise my song, and when I am agitated, I have difficulty with my tremolo.

Mrs. Jennings: You *always* have difficulty with it, Cuthbert, whether you are agitated or not.

Mr. Jennings: That is all the more reason why I should remain calm. This evening I wish little Mrs. Beeton to be suitably impressed.

Mrs. Jennings: *Mrs.* Beeton?

Mr. Jennings: Certainly. Mrs. Beeton is an elegant female, but a poor authoress. Only last week she brought me a novel with a view to publication. It is to soften the blow of refusal that I have invited her and her spouse to dine here this evening.

PHOEBE *comes in.*

Phoebe: Are these the spoons, 'm?

Mrs. Jennings: Of course those are the spoons, Phoebe.

Mr. Jennings: Lay them, girl, lay them.

Phoebe: Yes, sir.

She lays the spoons.

Mr. Jennings: And now perhaps, my dear Agatha, you will come and run through the

accompaniment of my song. I wish to get more passion into it than usual.

Mrs. Jennings: Is that also to impress Mrs. Beeton?

Mr. Jennings: Certainly not. The song *demands* passion.

Mrs. Jennings: Dear Cuthbert, I do not wish you to be disappointed——

Mr. Jennings: Disappointed! In what way?

Mrs. Jennings: Perhaps Mrs. Beeton will not *ask* you to sing.

Mr. Jennings (*amazed*): My dear! People *always* ask me to sing. Is there ever a dinner party amongst our acquaintances at which I am not asked whether I have a song in my pocket?

Mrs. Jennings: No, but——

Mr. Jennings: You need have no hesitation on that score, Mrs. Jennings. In any case, as I am in my own house, there need be no uncertainty in the matter. I shall certainly sing, whether I am asked or not. And now—a little more "impassionato," if you please.

They go into the Reception Room, R., *and* MR. JENNINGS *is heard singing "Home Sweet Home"—with "variations"—and a tremolo!*

PHOEBE *listens, more and more entranced, and then crosses to the door. The song breaks off.*

Phoebe: Oooh, sir, it was *lovely*!

Mr. Jennings (*off*): Return to your work, girl, at once. (*He comes in.*) What are you doing there, listening at keyholes? Is that the way to merit the good opinion of your employers? (*He sniffs.*) You are neglecting your duties in the kitchen. Something is burning.

Phoebe: Perhaps it's the shape, sir.

Mr. Jennings: The shape? *What* is the shape, Phoebe?

Phoebe: I don't know it's name, sir, but it won't come.

Mr. Jennings (*crushingly*): I was not aware that shapes came.

Phoebe: Oh, yes, sir.

Mr. Jennings: That will do, my girl, that will do.

Phoebe (*crushed*): Yes, sir.

Mr. Jennings: And open the kitchen window —open *all* the windows.

MRS. JENNINGS *comes in.*

Mrs. Jennings: Is anything the matter, Cuthbert?

Mr. Jennings: I have ordered our domestic to open the windows. This odour——

Mrs. Jennings: I detect no odour.

Mr. Jennings: In that case, Mrs. Jennings, I can only say that your olfactory organs are sadly defective. At least I insist upon your solicitude

as a wife when my nose is—*assaulted* in this way by *your* cooking!

Mrs. Jennings: If I had not been brought up in an Academy for Young Ladies, Mr. Jennings, your nose would be assaulted in *another* way.

Mr. Jennings: Am I to believe my ears?

Mrs. Jennings: Why not, if you are so ready to believe your nose?

MR. JENNINGS *swells with wrath.*

Mr. Jennings: Mrs. Jennings, I—I——

He is unable to find words in the presence of the domestic.

(*To* PHOEBE). Leave the room, girl!

Mrs. Jennings (*firmly*): Phoebe! Stay where you are!

Mr. Jennings (*with awful majesty*): Very well, Mrs. Jennings. If you can descend to the despicable subterfuge of hiding behind our domestic, I shall return to the pianoforte and play my *own* accompaniment.

He goes out.

Phoebe: Don't the master sing *lovely*, 'm! It's a gift.

Mrs. Jennings: Your master's gifts are no concern of yours, Phoebe.

Phoebe (*crushed*): No, 'm.

The ballad begins again in the other room. MR. JENNINGS *is accompanying himself, very badly, with one finger.*

Mrs. Jennings: And now, Phoebe, you must try not to make any mistakes to-night, when you're waiting at table.

Phoebe: I'll try 'm.

Mrs. Jennings: Mr. and Mrs. Beeton are only newly married.

Phoebe: He's a lucky man, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings: *All* men are lucky when they are married, Phoebe—not until. Remember that.

Phoebe: Yes, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings: Possibly one day some good man will be lucky enough to marry even you.

Phoebe: I 'ope so, 'm. Only no one ain't been lucky enough to ask me yet, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings (*solemnly*): While there is life there is hope, Phoebe. Now tell me, from which side do you hand the vegetables?

Phoebe (*promptly*): The left side, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings: And which is your left hand, Phoebe?

PHOEBE *is very doubtful and decides on the wrong one.*

Phoebe: This one, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings: No, no, *no*, girl! I see I must

tie something round your wrist to remind you. Have you a ribbon?

Phoebe: I've got a garter, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings (*scandalised*): Certainly not! Do not forget that you will be handing soup to gentlemen.

Phoebe: Yes, 'm.

MRS. JENNINGS *takes a ribbon from the table decorations.*

Mrs. Jennings: This will do. (*She ties it on.*) Now remember, *this* is your left hand.

Phoebe: And this is my right, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings: Certainly, girl. (*She sniffs.*) There *is* a rather peculiar odour. Go to the kitchen and see whether the mulligatawny soup is boiling over.

Phoebe: Yes, 'm.

PHOEBE *goes off to the kitchen. There is a crash of annoyance on the piano, and* MR. JENNINGS *comes in.*

Mr. Jennings: How much longer, Mrs. Jennings, am I to play my own accompaniment—and with *one finger*?

Mrs. Jennings (*calmly*): Until you learn to play it with *two*, Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings: Mrs. Jennings, I—— (*He sniffs.*) Why have the windows not been opened?

Mrs. Jennings: Because I forbade it.

Mr. Jennings: Is it your purpose to *asphyxiate* my guests?

Mrs. Jennings: If you do not recognise the smell of mulligatawny——

Mr. Jennings: I recognise the smell of *blacking*, madam!

Mrs. Jennings: *Blacking!*

Mr. Jennings: *Burnt* blacking!

Mrs. Jennings: How *dare* you!

Mr. Jennings: Your cooking, Mrs. Jennings, is a danger to the community.

Mrs. Jennings: Everybody knows you make a god of your stomach.

Mr. Jennings: And why not?—when all I get for it are *burnt offerings*!

Mrs. Jennings: You shall eat those words, Mr. Jennings!

Mr. Jennings: They'll be less indigestible than your cooking, Mrs. Jennings!

Mrs. Jennings: Oh! Mr. Jennings—you are a brute and——

She dissolves into tears.

Mr. Jennings (*loftily*): What is this? Tears? Tears?

Mrs. Jennings (*sobbing with anger*): Of anger!

Mr. Jennings: I insist that you go immediately and pour this so-called mulligatawny down the drain!

Mrs. Jennings (*indignantly*) : I shall do nothing of the sort !

Mr. Jennings : Then I shall give the necessary orders to our domestic.

Mrs. Jennings (*dangerously*) : Leave that bell alone, Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings : Am I master in my own house, or am I not ?

Mrs. Jennings : Not whilst you share it with *me*.

Mr. Jennings : Mrs. Jennings, you forget yourself !

Mrs. Jennings : Mr. Jennings, you are a fool !

Mr. Jennings (*staggered*) : I—I—I——!

PHOEBE *comes in.*

(*Savagely*.) What do *you* want ?

Phoebe : The front door bell, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings (*sweetly*) : That will be Mr. and Mrs. Beeton. Show them up into the parlour, Phoebe.

Phoebe : Yes, 'm.

Mr. Jennings : And when you return to the kitchen, girl, you will pour the soup down the drain.

Phoebe : The drain, sir ?

Mrs. Jennings : You will do nothing of the sort, Phoebe.

Phoebe : Yes, sir. No, 'm.

Mr. Jennings (*angrily*) : Mrs. Jennings, once and for all——

Mrs. Jennings: Not before the domestic.

Mr. Jennings: And in the meantime, Mr. and Mrs. Beeton are waiting on my doorstep. Go!

Phoebe: Yes, sir.

PHOEBE *goes out* R.

Mr. Jennings (*dictatorially*): We will commence the dinner with fish.

Mrs. Jennings (*firmly*): Soup!

Mr. Jennings: Fish!

Mrs. Jennings: Soup!

Mr. Jennings: Soup that smells like burnt blacking shall not be served in *my* house.

Mrs. Jennings: If you do not like the soup that is served in this house, then you can leave it.

Mr. Jennings: The soup, Mrs. Jennings?

Mrs. Jennings: The house, Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings (*angrily*): In all my experience of females——

PHOEBE *returns.*

Mrs. Jennings (*warningly*): Cuthbert!

Phoebe: They're in there, 'm.

MRS. JENNINGS *sails out into the parlour,* R.

Mrs. Jennings (*as she goes through the door*): My *dear* Mrs. Beeton! This is——

MR. JENNINGS *turns severely to* PHOEBE.

Mr. Jennings: See that you obey my instructions, Phoebe.

Phoebe: Yes, sir. What about, sir?

Mr. Jennings: The drain!

Phoebe: Oh, yes, sir.

Mr. Jennings: And take that ridiculous ribbon off your wrist.

Phoebe: But, sir——

Mr. Jennings: Do as you are told, girl.

She pulls the ribbon off. MR. JENNINGS *curls his moustache, shoots his cuffs, and goes off through the door into the parlour.*

(*As he goes out.*) Ah, my dear Mrs. Beeton, this is a very great pleasure——

PHOEBE *stands irresolutely holding the ribbon. She tries to remember which wrist it was on, and fails.* MRS. JENNINGS *comes in angrily.*

Mrs. Jennings: Phoebe!

Phoebe (*starting guiltily*)*:* Yes, 'm.

Mrs. Jennings: Announce dinner at once.

Phoebe: Yes, 'm.

MRS. JENNINGS *adjusts her smile and goes off.* PHOEBE *follows her to the door.*

(*at the door*)*:* Dinner is served, mum!

MRS. BEETON *enters solemnly on the arm of* MR. JENNINGS, *followed by* MRS. JENNINGS

on the arm of MR. BEETON. PHOEBE *goes out through the door,* L.

Mr. Jennings: As a novel, my dear Mrs. Beeton, your work was—er—unusual—almost unique.

Mrs. Beeton: You think I have talent, dear Mr. Jennings?

Mr. Jennings (*patting her hand*): Too much, I am afraid. I would suggest *household* duties.

He places MRS. BEETON *in her chair, facing the audience.*

Mr. Beeton: As I was saying, Lord Palmerston's Cabinet is composed exclusively of ineptitude and inefficiency. I hope you agree with me.

Mrs. Jennings: Of course, dear Mr. Beeton. Will you sit here?

She offers him the chair beside MRS. BEETON. *He is about to sit down when* MR. JENNINGS, *who has been glaring at him, interrupts.*

Mr. Jennings: Permit me to tell you, sir, that in this house Lord Palmerston is regarded as the saviour of this country.

Mr. Beeton (*soothingly*): Exactly what I was about to remark, sir. If only the Cabinet had Lord Palmerston's capacity——

Mr. Jennings: The gentlemen who form Lord Palmerston's Cabinet number amongst them, sir,

some of the highest intellects that have ever been gathered about the person of our gracious Queen.

Mrs. Jennings: I am sure we're going to have a very enjoyable evening. Are we not, dear Mrs. Beeton?

Mrs. Beeton: I am sure of it, dear Mrs. Jennings. Dear Samuel is the soul of tact

Mrs. Jennings: He will need to be.

Mr. Jennings: Possibly, sir, you approve also of the Sunday Trading Bill?

Mr. Beeton: Indeed yes, sir. One of the most progressive measures that has ever been——

Mr. Jennings: A disgrace, sir! A disgrace to the boasted freedom of England!

Mr. Beeton: That depends, sir, upon how you look at it.

Mr. Jennings: However you look at it!

Mrs. Jennings (interrupting): Really, Cuthbert, you cannot discuss politics the whole evening. The soup will be cold.

Mr. Jennings (with a terrible frown): The soup—cold? Phoebe has my instructions with regard to the soup.

Mrs. Jennings (aggressively): And mine. (*Sweetly to* MR. BEETON.) Won't you sit down, dear Mr. Beeton?

Mr. Beeton: Thank you.

He sits down. There is a moment's pause.

MR. JENNINGS glances at the door

Mrs. Jennings: Well, Cuthbert——

Mr. Jennings (*still sore about Palmerston*): Well, Mrs. Jennings? Are we to dine, or are we not?

PHOEBE *comes in, in great distress.*

Phoebe: If you please, 'm.

Mr. Jennings (*sternly*): What is it, girl?

Phoebe: If you please, 'm—I've dropped the shape!

Mr. Jennings (*with exaggerated calmness*): You have dropped the shape! Excellent—excellent. You observe, my dear Mrs. Jennings, I give a dinner party, I extend the hospitality of my roof to Mr. and Mrs. Beeton, and all that your half-witted domestic can do is *juggle* with the shape!

Phoebe (*hesitatingly*): The—the soup's ready, 'm.

Mr. Jennings (*in an awful voice*): Soup! Did you say—*soup*?

Mrs. Beeton (*charmingly*): Dear Mrs. Jennings, pray do not be distressed. Dear Samuel is fortunately not partial to shapes. Soups are his passion. Are they not, Samuel?

Mr. Beeton: Indeed, passion is scarcely too strong a word.

Phoebe: Shall I serve the soup, 'm?

Mr. Jennings: *Soup!* Certainly not!

Mrs. Jennings (*hurriedly*): Yes, Phoebe—serve the soup.

PHOEBE *goes off.* MR. *and* MRS. JENNINGS *glare at one another, taking no notice of their guests.*

Mr. Beeton (*making conversation*) : The opening of the Crystal Palace by our dear Queen was really a most enjoyable function. Were you present, dear Mrs. Jennings ?

PHOEBE *brings in a tureen of soup. She puts it down on a side table and brings a plateful to* MRS. BEETON.

Mrs. Jennings : I had a new bonnet for the occasion—(*to* MRS. BEETON)—green plush, with roses.

Mrs. Beeton : Most becoming. Worn slightly on the left side——

PHOEBE *hands the soup on the wrong side as* MRS. BEETON *speaks.*

Mrs. Jennings (*sharply*) : The other side, idiot !

Mrs. Beeton (*surprised*) : I beg your pardon ?

Mrs. Jennings (*sweetly*) : So sorry—the girl—little stupid. (*To* PHOEBE.) The ribbon !

Phoebe : Please, 'm, the master took it off me, 'm.

Mr. Jennings : *I !*

Mrs. Jennings : *Mr.* Jennings ! Since when have you taken to being familiar with our domestic ?

Mr. Jennings: Ridiculous nonsense, Mrs. Jennings!

Phoebe: Shall I go on serving the soup, 'm?

Mr. Jennings: Yes—yes.

Phoebe: Which side, sir?

Mr. Jennings: *Any* side!

PHOEBE *goes for another plateful for* MR. BEETON.

Mrs. Beeton (*making conversation*): Dear Mrs. Jennings, how delightfully your house is situated.

Mr. Beeton: Indeed, yes. So salubrious a neighbourhood!

Mrs. Beeton: So fashionable!

Mr. Beeton: So charming!

Mrs. Beeton: So rural!

At this moment PHOEBE *places a plateful of soup before* MR. BEETON.

Mr. Beeton (*sniffing*): Do you suffer from *drains*, Mr. Jennings?

Mr. Jennings: *Drains*, sir?

Mr. Beeton: If I may say so, there is a slight taint on the air——

Mr. Jennings (*grimly*): You observe *that*, Mrs. Jennings?

Mr. Beeton (*hastily*): Not that drains are in their way at all unpleasant, I assure you.

Mrs. Beeton: Dear Samuel *adores* drains.

Mr. Jennings (*grimly*): The taint to which you refer is not due to drains, Mr. Beeton.

Mr. Beeton: Indeed.

Mr. Jennings: Mrs. Jennings can explain its source of origin to you more clearly than I.

Mrs. Beeton: Dear Mrs. Jennings, I understand. *We* had beetles, too. Mr. Keating's excellent powder works wonders.

Mr. Jennings: Beetles are not the cause, madam. Though I have no doubt Mr. Keating's powder would be equally applicable in *this* case.

PHOEBE *goes to the sideboard for more soup, but does not actually serve any.* MRS. BEETON *tastes her soup.*

Mrs. Beeton: Oh!

Mr. Jennings: What is the matter, dear Mrs. Beeton?

Mrs. Beeton (*hurriedly*): Nothing, dear Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings (*grimly*): Perhaps the soup is not to your liking?

Mrs. Beeton: Not at all. That is——

MR. BEETON *tastes his soup and splutters.*

Mr. Jennings: Mr. Beeton, sir!

Mr. Beeton: I fear my appetite is—is not what it was.

Mrs. Beeton (*faintly*): It is strange, is it not, how one's appetite comes—and goes?

Mr. Jennings (*severely*) : And now, Mrs. Jennings, perhaps you will admit that I was right.

Mrs. Jennings : Never, Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings : If the domestic had poured this disgusting concoction down the drain, this deplorable scene could never have occurred.

Mrs. Jennings (*with spirit*) : Is it your purpose to insult me before my guests ?

Mr. Jennings (*with equal spirit*) : Is it your purpose to poison my guests before me ?

Mrs. Beeton : Dear Mr. Jennings—the soup *is* perhaps a little—unusual.

Mr. Jennings : Unusual !

Mrs. Beeton : But if you will allow me—— Dear Mrs. Jennings, please do not think that I am impertinent—but I have made a special study of soups.

Mr. Beeton : Indeed yes, sir. The way in which Mrs. Beeton can make a soup out of practically nothing is a wonder.

Mr. Jennings : If she can make a soup out of *this*, it will be a *miracle* !

Mrs. Beeton : Have I your permission to try, dear Mrs. Jennings ?

Mrs. Jennings (*grimly*) : Since Mr. Jennings—who took me for better or worse—appears not to be satisfied with *my* cooking—— !

Mrs. Beeton : I am sure your cooking is admirable. It is the ingredients.

Mr. Jennings : Blacking's one of 'em !

Mrs. Beeton (*soothing him*) : Dear Mr. Jennings —if you will have a moment's patience. (*To* MRS. JENNINGS.) In mulligatawny a glass of sherry wine—and the juice of a lemon. A little more seasoning—pepper—and, if I might suggest, the white of an egg.

She looks at PHOEBE.

Phoebe : Shall I fetch them, mum ?

Mrs. Jennings (*acidly*) : Since Mrs. Beeton is so kind——

Mr. Jennings : Certainly, girl, certainly !

PHOEBE *goes out.*

Mrs. Beeton (*to* MRS. JENNINGS) : In clear mulligatawny it is truly remarkable the flavour imparted by the juice of a lemon.

Mrs. Jennings (*with acid politeness*) : Indeed !

Mr. Beeton : As a cook, sir, my wife is unique.

Mr. Jennings : So is mine !

Mrs. Beeton (*with a fond look*) : *Dear* Samuel.

Mrs. Jennings (*with anything but a fond look*) : *Dear* Cuthbert !

MRS. BEETON *looks lovingly at* MR. BEETON —MRS. JENNINGS *glares at* MR. JENNINGS. *After a moment* MRS. BEETON *recollects herself*

Mrs. Beeton (*to* MRS. JENNINGS) : And one apple—sliced—before cooking, of course.

Mr. Jennings: Dear Mrs. Beeton, you are indeed a walking cookery book.

Mr. Beeton (proudly): As I have always said, Mr. Jennings.

Mrs. Beeton (carried away by her subject): After the soup has simmered for two hours, it should be strained and allowed to cool. When cold the white of an egg should be added—as well as the shell.

Mr. Jennings: The *shell*?

Mrs. Beeton: When crushed, it has a most striking effect upon the flavour.

PHOEBE *comes in with some things on a tray.*

Phoebe: I've squoze the lemon, 'm.

Mrs. Beeton: Allow me, dear Mrs. Jennings.

She gets up and goes to the tureen—busying herself with it.

Phoebe: Shall I take these plates, sir?

Mr. Jennings: Certainly, certainly.

Phoebe takes the plates and lays two clean soup spoons. MRS. BEETON *talks whilst preparing the soup in the tureen.*

Mrs. Beeton: Clear mulligatawny should be served with boiled rice, either handed round separately, or put into the soup. When convenient, a little cooked chicken may also be served—cut into cubes and warmed.

Mrs. Jennings: Surely, Mrs. Beeton, it is not necessary——

Mrs. Beeton (*to* MRS. JENNINGS): Indeed it is. If I wish to retain dear Samuel's affection, I must feed him. (*To* PHOEBE.) Mrs. Jennings. (*To* MRS. JENNINGS.) Everyone knows the surest way to a man's heart is through his stomach. (*To* PHOEBE.) Mr. Jennings.

During the above she has ladled out two platefuls of soup, and PHOEBE *has taken them to* MR. *and* MRS. JENNINGS.

Mrs. Beeton: Do but try one spoonful, dear Mrs. Jennings. (*She sits down.* PHOEBE *watches* MRS. JENNINGS *anxiously.*) MRS. JENNINGS *takes a cautious sip.*

Mrs. Jennings (*amazed*): But *really*—this is——! My *dear*—I had no idea that soup——

She hastily takes another spoonful. MR. JENNINGS, *who has been watching her, now takes a spoonful.* PHOEBE *turns her attention to him.*

Mr. Jennings (*with enthusiasm*): My *dear* Mrs. Beeton! This is a miracle! Delicious!

PHOEBE *now serves* MR. *and* MRS. BEETON.

Mrs. Jennings: Really, it is surprising what a difference the white of an egg——

Mrs. Beeton: And the juice of a lemon.

Mr. Beeton (*tasting his soup*) : Very creditable, Mrs. Beeton, very creditable indeed.

Mr. Jennings : Creditable, sir ! I should never have believed it *possible*. Agatha, my love, you must certainly obtain the recipe from Mrs. Beeton.

Mrs. Jennings : If she will be so kind.

Mrs. Beeton : Of course, dear Mrs. Jennings.

Mrs. Jennings : To think that you—a bride—should be so experienced in the culinary art.

Mrs. Beeton : It is not always those who have been married longest who cook the best.

Mr. Jennings (*looking at* MRS. JENNINGS) : How true ! (*To* MR. BEETON.) Mr. Beeton, sir, you have a happy life before you ! When I think——

Mrs. Jennings (*grimly*) : *Well*, Mr. Jennings ? And *what* do you think ?

Mr. Jennings : Nothing, my dear.

Mrs. Jennings : As usual !

PHOEBE *removes the plates.*

Mr. Jennings : My dear young lady, why have you wasted your time in writing a novel ?

Mrs. Beeton : *Wasted*, Mr. Jennings ?

Mr. Jennings : Certainly. A woman who can cook like you has no right to do anything *except* cook.

Phoebe : Shall I serve the fish, 'm ?

MR. JENNINGS *groans and his expression changes to one of intense gloom.*

Mrs. Beeton: You are ill, dear Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings: No, no. Merely the thought of fish cooked by Mrs. Jennings after soup prepared by Mrs. Beeton!

Mrs. Jennings (*aggressively*): And why not? I have cooked fish for you for thirty years, Mr. Jennings.

Mr. Jennings: And it has tasted like wet cotton wool the entire time, Mrs. Jennings!

PHOEBE *brings in a dish of fried plaice and puts it on the sideboard.*

Mrs. Jennings (*very acidly*): Perhaps you would like *dear* Mrs. Beeton to work another of her *miracles*!

Mr. Jennings: I am afraid, my love, that your genius for spoiling fish is proof against even Mrs. Beeton's skill.

Mrs. Beeton: Oh, no. If dear Mrs. Jennings will allow me——

Mrs. Jennings (*bitterly*): Since my house is no longer my own——!

MRS. BEETON *gets up and goes to her.*

Mrs. Beeton: Please, dear Mrs. Jennings! And consider—(*she sinks her voice confidentially*)—a

few hints from me—a little help—and Mr. Jennings will never be ill-tempered again.

She crosses to the sideboard.

Mrs. Beeton (*to* PHOEBE): A little butter—a lemon—anchovy—and fried parsley.

PHOEBE *goes out.*

Mr. Beeton (*to* MR. JENNINGS): I trust, sir, that you and Mrs. Jennings will take an early opportunity of dining with us.

Mr. Jennings: A whole meal cooked by Mrs. Beeton!

Mr. Beeton: Believe me, sir, there is nothing better to be had.

Mr. Jennings: I *do* believe you, sir. (*He shakes* MR. BEETON'S *hand enthusiastically.*) I accept your invitation, sir, with the greatest pleasure. Let me see, will to-morrow be soon enough?

Mr. Beeton (*rather taken aback*): Hospitality is the most sacred virtue of an English home, but——

Mr. Jennings: Then we will say to-morrow.

Mr. Beeton: We shall be most happy. (*To* MRS. BEETON.) Shall we not, my love?

Mrs. Beeton: Indeed, yes.

Mr. Jennings (*shaking hands again*): Extremely affable, Mr. Beeton.

Mrs. Beeton: And you shall choose the menu yourself, dear Mrs. Jennings.

Mrs. Jennings: I am afraid Mr. Jennings would not approve the menu if I chose it.

Mr. Jennings: As long as you don't *cook* it!

Mrs. Beeton: And perhaps after dinner we might have a little music.

Mr. Jennings: Music! Ahem! I was saying to my dear wife only a few minutes before you came in that I hardly ever sing nowadays. Was I not, Agatha?

Mrs. Jennings (*acidly*): Before or after your tremolo?

Mrs. Beeton: That is too bad, dear Mr. Jennings. We had hoped that you might sing for us after dinner this evening.

Mr. Jennings: Possibly. I *might* find a little something.

Mrs. Jennings (*snappily*): Ridiculous nonsense, Cuthbert!

Mr. Jennings: Mrs. Jennings!

Mrs. Jennings (*snappily*): "Home Sweet Home!"

They glare at one another.

Mr. Beeton (*looking from one to another*): I am sure it is, dear Mrs. Jennings. A *model* home.

PHOEBE *returns with things on a tray.*

Phoebe: I've got them, 'm.

MRS. BEETON *busies herself again at the side table.*

Mrs. Beeton: It is all a matter of the sauce and the garnishing. Just a touch of lemon—applied *before* cooking it keeps the fish white—and a little melted butter—so. Parsley gives a distinctive character to the dish—it is better fried—and anchovy adds a relish which is quite indescribable. There, dear Mrs. Jennings——!

She returns to her seat.

Mrs. Jennings: Serve the fish, Phoebe.

PHOEBE *brings two plates of fish, giving one to* MRS. BEETON *and the other to* MR. JENNINGS.

Mr. Jennings: Really, the—ah!—the *aroma*—is most appetising!

Mr. Beeton: I assure you, sir, you will not be disappointed in the taste.

Mr. Jennings: I am sure of it.

He takes a mouthful of the fish.

Wonderful!

He lays down his knife and fork and stands up formally.

(*Rhetorically.*) Mr. Beeton—my dear Mrs. Beeton—I have come to a momentous decision—one which vitally affects the future happiness and welfare of every English household. As a novelist, my dear Mrs. Beeton, you would be forgotten in a month. But if you will agree to write for me a book of *another* kind your name will live for ever!

Mrs. Beeton: A book——?

Mr. Jennings: A *cookery* book!

Mr. and Mrs. Beeton (*together*): A *cookery* book!

Mr. Jennings: "Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book!" You agree?

MRS. BEETON *rises and gives him her hand.*

Mrs. Beeton: Yes.

MR. JENNINGS *kisses* MRS. BEETON'S *hand gallantly.*

Mr. Jennings (*formally*): Mrs. Beeton! I salute the mother of English cooking!

He turns to MR. BEETON *and takes his hand.*

Mr. Jennings: Mr. Beeton, sir, you are indeed a happy man!

Tableau.

CURTAIN

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QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

JUST BOYS

1. "Geraldy handles this fragile theme with immense skill and discretion. He does not sentimentalise it, nor does he refine it to nothing." (St. John Ervine.) Discuss how this success is accomplished.

2. Compress the essential matter of this play into a paraphrase of not more than 100 words.

3. Refer to specific incidents in the play where we have examples of that "economy of time" which is so characteristic a feature of the one-act play.

4. Copy out what you consider is the most moving speech in the whole play. Give the reasons for your choice.

THE MAP

1. Make a series of sketches of designs for the costumes of the five characters in the play. Let your designs be as romantic and as colourful as possible—but remember that costumes when on the stage must group and blend together.

2. Study Browning's poem *Fra Lippo Lippi.*

3. Write a short story of your own invention entitled "The Spy." Try to make the various situations as thrilling and as interesting as possible and endeavour to keep your reader's interest until the very end of your story.

4. Make a list of the words and phrases in this play which you associate particularly with a mediæval atmosphere.

FAMILY COMEDY

1. "The Bible is for Sunday—it's not real life." Write an essay on this theme.

2. Who is the more unreasonable, Mr. or Mrs. Porter? Give reasons for your decision.

3. Discuss Ruskin's contention in *Sesame and Lilies* that "a man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise: she

enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation."

WAYSIDE WAR

1. Write an essay on "Chivalry, Ancient and Modern."

2. Imagine that in 1690 Alicia Pemberton and the Colonel (now a civilian) find themselves travelling together in a stage coach.

Try to construct what you imagine their conversation would be.

3. Study carefully the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*, Act IV, Scene 3.

4. Which are the weak and which are the strong points in the Colonel's character?

THE RECOIL

1. Explain the title of the play.

2. Describe the essential differences in make-up which the four actors in this play should observe.

3. Describe either in the form of a short story or in a single dramatic scene any thrilling incident in the life of a Roman Legionary stationed at one of the forts along Hadrian's Wall.

MEET MRS. BEETON

1. Rewrite the first six pages of the play in modern English, keeping the same relationship between the characters and endeavouring to keep the comedy equally vital and convincing.

2. Write an essay on "The Sins of the Victorians."

GENERAL EXERCISES

1. Construct a scale model of the modern stage complete with working miniatures of as many of the accessories as you are able to devise. (You will be surprised how interesting a hobby this may become. You will find it particularly useful later to try out your productions in miniature before staging a play properly.)

2. Construct lighter and simpler models of other types of theatres, e.g. the Greek, the Elizabethan. Reference books and encyclopædias will provide you with the necessary information to work on.

3. Design a programme cover for a dramatic performance which shall contain one or more of the plays in this volume.

4. Make a list of the various people, other than the actors and actresses, who are required to co-operate in the successful production of a modern play. Write a brief note on the duties expected of each of these people.

5. Make a list of the various "arts" (speech, gesture, etc.) which an actor relies on in his interpretation of character. Add brief notes on the proper use of each of these.

6. (*a*) Prepare a list of some well-known modern actors and actresses. Add, if you can, the names of the plays in which they have appeared. (*b*) Do the same for the actors and actresses of the films.

7. Write an essay contrasting the art of the stage with the art of the film.

8. Write an original appreciation of any "good" film you have witnessed.

9. "Perforce because of its very shortness the one-act play must develop quickly, both in action and in characterisation. It should establish atmosphere within a few moments after the curtain has arisen." Discuss with what success this is obtained in the various plays included in this collection.

These pages are left blank so that the producer's comments and instructions can be with the text instead of on separate pieces of paper.